DotAfrica History Paper
1. Background

At the beginning of the second round of the new Generic Top Level Domain (gTLD) application in 2000, an entrepreneur from a western country had the idea of running dot Africa. The entrepreneur approached Nii Quaynor[1] and Pierre Dandjinou, Africa's well known technology ambassadors to organize support for the re-delegation and operation of the geographic domain. "The Western company did not only approach us in 2000, but indeed wentahead in one of the ICANN meetings then and claimed to run the .Africa. A group of African participants then stood up and in a collective move defended that .Africa shall be run by an AfricaGrown company for the benefits of Africans."[2]

To follow up on the matter, the African technologists then developed a concept paper on how the .Africa should be run for the benefits of Africa[3]. They wanted .Africa to be expressive and thus detailed it as 'DotAfrica' in the paper which was latter circulated and posted on the website (http://www.dotafrica.org/). Nii Quaynor registered that name and continued paying for it[4]. The domain dotafrica.org was created on 2004 thus:
Domain ID:D104553929-LROR
Domain Name:DOTAFRICA.ORG
Created On:21-Jun-2004 20:33:13 UTC.
DotAfrica.org domain existed long before dotconnectafrica.org was registered as further timeline evidence.

By the time ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) held its first meeting in Africa in Accra in 2002, the idea of redelegation of dot Africa was floated to other experts and the feeling was that at that time, Africa had other more challenging problems like redelegation of country code Top Level Domains, connectivity infrastructure issues, and policy development among other challenges.It was largely agreed that the best approach was to tackle the elementary problems such as connectivity and redelegation of ccTLDs before dealing with dot Africa.

Some of the elementary problems were: connecting the Eastern Africa region with the fiber optic cable to reduce its reliance on satellite connectivity, increasing the number of fiber optic cables in west Africa to further reduce connectivity costs, boosting network infrastructure to interconnect different countries and exchange content locally and developing registry operations to support growth of country code Top Level Domains, among other challenges.The policy and

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[1] Nii Quaynor was chairman of the General Assembly of the DNSO from 1999 and on the board of ICANN from 2000 to 2003. He was ccTLD operator for .gh since 1995 and certainly more knowledgeable about registry operation and contributed to define the .africa model.
[2] Interview with Pierre Dandjinou. June 12, 2012.
[3] Interview with Jean Robert Hountomey, June 28, 2012
[4] Ibid.

infrastructure discussions started an investment wave that saw several investors coming together to initiate several fiber optic cables in such-EASSY, TEAMS, and SEACOM among others. These investment vehicles were both private and public-private partnerships.

By 2006, it was clear that the connectivity hurdle was going to be cleared and the debate focused back to dot Africa. In the meantime, European countries had rallied behind dot EU and Asian countries were galvanizing support for dot Asia.

In Africa, the debate was centered on the shape and form of dot Africa organization, and the role governments and private sector would play in promoting dot Africa, and how the organization would contribute to training and infrastructure development

2. The new generic top-level domains program

Since 2002, ICANN has been working on modalities for the introduction of a new application of new gTLDs. This is meant to increase competition and choice by introducing Internet addressing system. In 2005, ICANN's Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) began a policy development process to consider the introduction of new gTLDs, based on the results of trial rounds conducted in 2000 and 2003[5]. In June 2011, ICANN's Board of Directors approved the Guidebook and authorized the launch of the New gTLD Program in 2012.

As a result of this development, a new interest arose in the dotAfrica namespace. According to the AU[6] the implementation of dotAfrica will add value to the internet namespace as a recognizable phrase which focuses on African identity.

In preparation to respond to the call for new gTLDs, the extra ordinary session of Africa Ministers in charge of communications and information technologies, held in Johanesburg in January 2010 adopted a resolution to "establish dotAfrica as a continental Top-Level- Domain for use by organizations, businesses and individuals with guidance from African internet agencies[7]'. Further, the same Ministers meeting at the third ordinary session of the AU in August 2010 requested the AU to "set up the structure and modalities for the implementation of the dotAfrica project."

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[5] http://newgtlds.icann.org/en/about/program (retrieved July 30, 2012)
[6]https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:cS8aacsz9o0J:www.nepad.org/system/files/Background%2520note%2520%2520on%2520DotAfrica%2520-Final%2520version%2520ENG.pdf+history+of+the+dotafrica&hl=en&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESj50qseA2--egm7uF6-sI2NsXyOhPd_M24aAjPWOMoyX15jbhZcWmuZNd8DTCtP-vl-aRxTvBMC7uFPNOpV9zbjkMYCCe80jHDnA39be_WJhrScgzZ8TFb_aNB5Q-9pQuoqoxW3&sig=AHIEtbTUHO4ebuDW9yHHXsI4Q_VWc1dl8A
[7] Ibid.

The AU then set up a task force comprising African experts in the domain. Following the recommendations of these experts, the AUC opted for an open process through which it would apply for the operation of dotAfrica during the next round of new gTLDs (already launched by ICANN) and tender for an entity that would operate dotAfrica on behalf of member states.

3. The dotAfrica Management

The African Union Commission (AUC) was entrusted by its member states to carry out the process of applying to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) for the dotAfrica gTLD in terms of the New Generic Top Level Domain (gTLD) programme. dotAfrica is set to be a distinctive pan-African identification for regional online operations[8].

The dotAfrica TLD was proposed as a new gTLD for the promotion of Africa business, peoples and culture in the Internet[9]. Further, the name dotAfrica is the specific namespace for Africa, which is anticipated to create an attractive regional home for the Panafrican Internet Community[10].

In 2011, the AU invited interested companies based in Africa to express interest in running dot Africa, indicating clearly their registry operational experience, stating where the registry operations will be based, how the operation will benefit African countries and a methodology of how these benefits will trickle down.Further, Africa TLD[11] organization (AfTLD) which brings together ccTLDs in the region, rendered its support to the AUC in sponsoring and selecting the right organization to run dot Africa TLD.

After deliberations on the technical, financial ability and benefits to Africa tech community, UNIFORUM[12] was selected by the AUC as the organization to establish and run dot Africa.The endorsement of the UNIFORUM is the only formal endorsement provided by the African Union and its member's states with regard to dotAfrica[13].The endorsement followed the evaluation of proposals submitted in December 2011, which saw local and international registries interested in managing dotAfrica gTLD tender their proposals. UniForum is

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[8] http://www.au.int/en/dotAfrica%20gTLD (retrieved August 03, 2012)
[9] Background note on dotAfrica. May 2011.
https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:cS8aacsz9o0J:www.nepad.org/system/files/Background%2520note%2520%2520on%2520DotAfrica%2520-Final%2520version%2520ENG.pdf+history+of+the+dotafrica&hl=en&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESj50qseA2--egm7uF6-sI2NsXyOhPd_M24aAjPWOMoyX15jbhZcWmuZNd8DTCtP-vl-aRxTvBMC7uFPNOpV9zbjkMYCCe80jHDnA39be_WJhrScgzZ8TFb_aNB5Q-9pQuoqoxW3&sig=AHIEtbTUHO4ebuDW9yHHXsI4Q_VWc1dl8A (retrieved August 01, 2012).
[10] http://www.au.int/pages/infosoc/pages/dotafrica-top-level-domain-africa-project (retrieved July 30, 2012)
[11] AfTLD (African Top Level Domain) is a non-profit organization composed of registry operators in Africa
[12] http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/AUC-dotAfrica-Communique-.pdf
[13] Ibid.

known for operating the co.za registry, Africa's largest registry with more than 800,000 domain names[14]. UNIFORUM is the first sponsored registry that will be operating from Africa. It will echo ongoing operation and successes of other community TLDs.

The agreement defining the relationship between AUC and Uniforum was formalized in March 2012 during the ICANN 43rd meeting at San Jose, Costa Rica. The dotAfrica will be administered in an inclusive and professional manner and in accordance with the project proposal submitted by ZACR during the tender process.

Upon its election, UNIFORUM met with representatives to establish a steering committee that would be charged with moral and ethical oversight over dotafrica. Toward this end, representatives of the broader African Internet community are currently participating in the project through the Steering Committee which comprises African Internet experts, Country Code managers, Registrars and others volunteering for a better Internet for Africa.**For more details on dotafrica project, please see Annex 1 of this report.**

UNIFORUM as a bidding registry operator in April 2012 submitted to ICANN its bid to administer dotAfrica.**I**CANN is currently processing over five hundred applications for different TLDs. This means a decision on dotAfrica is only likely in the first quarter of 2013[15].

4. AfTLD (**African Top Level Domain**) participation in .Africa

AfTLD's interest in .Africa started as early as 2007 when its Board of Directors started asking itself informally on how AfTLD should position itself in relation to the potential .Africa gTLD.[16] There were obvious concerns that some of AfTLD members had, including the likelihood of .Africa posing more aggressive competition to african ccTLDs than other gTLDs had done.

A decision was made in late 2009 when the Board felt it needed to investigate the pros and cons of .Africa. Without doubt, there was already an existing .Africa initiative by leading figures in the African internet community. This was under dotafrica.org. "So in our consultations as AfTLD, we consulted different African personalities. The feedback was overwhelmingly simple: AfTLD should, in fact, be the home of .Africa"! says Vika Mpisane the President of AfTLD. A key reason put forward was that if AfTLD took leadership of .Africa, it would ensure that the .Africa proceeds do not just benefit private companies, but would be used to build up African ccTLDs. This was seen as one major advantage African

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[14] http://www.circleid.com/posts/sedari_supports_application_for_the_dotafrica_domain_name/
[15] http://africainonespace.org/content.php?id=5&title=What%20is%20dotAfrica? (retrieved August 14, 2012)
[16] Interview with Vika Mpisane, President AfTLD. August 14, 2012

ccTLDs have over other gTLDs. It meant that unlike .com, .Africa could be used to directly help build African ccTLDs, and AfTLD would ensure this happens.

AfTLD's formal .Africa work started in earnest in late 2009 with lobbying efforts both in Africa and abroad. In early 2010 the AfTLD Board held a special meeting in Dar es Salaam to decide on the best implementation approach, and accordingly released a Request for Proposals (RFP). This was informed by the fact that a number of leading international registry operators were keen to work with AfTLD. "In fact, all of those we ever spoke to unanimously felt AfTLD was the best suited to bid for .Africa, in particular if it could ensure the support of the African Union Commission" affirms Mpisane.

The RFP generated a lot of interest and AfTLD received proposals from some of the most reputable gTLD and ccTLD registry operators. The AfTLD Board made a final decision during the AfTLD 2010 AGM in Accra, and consequently started negotiations with its preferred registry partner in July 2010. "This was not an easy negotiation – not at all. In fact, it clearly required AfTLD to be well resourced to contract suitable legal, financial and technical specialists to help in the negotiations".

It was clear though that the most impacting factor in AfTLD's bid was what the AUC would want from .Africa. AfTLD clearly supported the view that the AU is the custodian of the name "Africa" and should play a decisive role in determining how best to implement .Africa. "Unfortunately, the AUC never came forward clearly until the last minute. May be this was an unintended stroke of genius on the AUC's part, as its RFP was very decisive and imposed a community-owned and backed .Africa" said Mpisane.

The AUC RFP made it clear that AUC wanted African ccTLDs to play a crucial role in implementing .Africa. The AUC wanted .Africa run by an African operator using an African technology. This forced AfTLD to do an immediate review of its bid. Mpisane says that It was out of this reality that he personally (in his capacity as AfTLD Chairman at the time) lobbied the AfTLD Directors, key AfTLD members African community to find a suitable registry partner and investor from Africa.

There was only one African registry operator that had a registry technology that met ICANN's registry requirements. That is how, with the support of the African internet community, the ZA Central Registry (UniForum SA), which runs an EPP registry system, was put forward to work with the community, especially AfTLD, to send a proposal to the AUC. The ZACR bid, which had the express backing of individual African ccTLDs, AfTLD and key African community members, got the approval of the AUC.

5. Confusion of strings

The dotAfrica namespace has attracted attention from a variety of entities. For example between 2007 and 2008, a private sector initiative emerged, promising to run dot Africa with the support of the African Union but it was marred by controversy because the African Union Commission only expressed its intention to rally African countries behind dot Africa in 2009 and in 2010.

There was an actual .africa string application in one of the previous rounds. The applicant even paid a fee, but never came to present[17]. "I personally helped to pen the GAC' s opposition statement to this application. This statement was, if memory serves me right, actually adopted by the Country Code TLD Registry Constituency, as it was then known, largely intact" says Pierre Dandjinou[18]. This effectively means that there has not been any application for the .Africastring as reflected here on the application list http://archive.icann.org/en/tlds/tld-applications-lodged-02oct00.htm, apart from those we now have with the new gTLD programme[19].

At the moment, there are two applications with similar strings applied for by UNIFORUM on behalf of the AUC, and Dotconnect Africa (DCA).

In 2007, the bearer of the DCA initiative approached the technology ambassadors wanting to work together as well as bring the diaspora perspective so that all cold collectively move the agenda for Africa[20]. "We shared our visions for Africa as relates to Internet development, and also a copy of the concept note developed on the dotafrica at that time (2004-2005)".

The DCA representative on her part says that DCA's most important contribution is in re-starting, reviving and re-energizing the DotAfrica project, and after resuscitating it, giving itfresh impetus, momentum and new significance. "Without DCA, we believe that the project would have continued to languish due to lack of attention at ICANN".[21]

Dr. Yassin Mshana, feels that gTLD saga is putting African Internet business in a delicate situation."Is it a new version of Scramble for Africa by Africans?The PDP by ICANN is there to refer to in addition to clear Guidelines for gTLD applications, one wonders why the infighting? Is that a sign of maturity, strength or weakness - market forces will give the answer. We may lose the chance to take part in the global economy due to manner some opinion-leaders in Internet Development in Africa behaved"[22].

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[17] https://lists.afrinic.net/pipermail/africann/2012-July/005075.html
[18] Interview with Pierre Dandjinou. June 12, 2012
[19] Communication between **Calvin Browne and Rebecca Wanjiku. July 2, 2012**
[20] Interview with Pierre Dandjinou. June 12, 2012.
[21] Communication between Sophia Bekele and Rebecca Wanjiku. July 31, 2012.
[22] Communication between Dr. Yassin Mshana and Rebecca Wanjiku. June 28, 2012

Conclusion

To be done after comments

Dot Africa proposal
Organization Information
Company Name: DotAfrica Organization Limited (to be incorporated)
Company Website: www.dotafrica.org
Company Contact Name: Pierre Ouedraogo

Contributors to proposal:
Pierre Ouedraogo, Boukina Faso (coordinator)
Pierre Dandjinou, Benin
Muhamet Diop, Senegal
Brian Longwe, Kenya
Jobe, Gambia
Mohamed Bashir, Sudan
Nii Quaynor, Ghana

Namestrings:
The Dotafrrica sTLD registry will accept registrations in the second level (e.g. domain-name.africa) and the names will conform to standard DNS naming conventions

Some names will be reserved in consultation with sponsoring ccTLDs and relevant parties.

The Dotafrica sTLD registry will resolve .afrique as equivalent to .africa. Dotafrica will coordinate with ICANN to introduce multilingual TLDs in to .afrca.

The governance structure of the DotAfrica Organization will be constituted based on two types of membership organizations:

Sponsoring Members
1. Sponsoring Members
Sponsoring Members shall be organizations in the Pan Africa region
as defined by ICANN Africa Region (based on the ICANN
Region definitions) that manage and operate any of the country code Top Level Domain (ccTLD) registries in the region. Other sponsoring Members shall be Pan-Africa Internet, Information Technology, Telecommunications, non-profit, NGO or other relevant community organizations in the African region.
2. Members

African organizations with strong interest in the development of name space for Africa but do not have Pan-Africa scope in their operations. These organizations may be sub-regional or country focused.

The governance of the DotAfrica Organization will be the responsibility of a Board of Directors and will be advised by an Advisory Council. There will be eleven (9) persons in the proposed Board of Directors, which will be elected based on the following structure:

- 6 seats nominated and elected by Sponsoring Members
- 2 seats nominated and elected by Other Members
- 1 seat for the CEO of the DotAfrica registry

The geographic diversity requirement necessary for the multicultural and diverse African community will be satisfied with a requirement of one person be elected from one of the six sub-regions of AfriNIC/AfNOG i.e. north, south, east, west, central and Indian Ocean.

Members of the Board are expected to act on behalf of the Dotafrica organization

An Advisory Council will advise the Board on policy matters. The Advisory Council's membership will be based on the following criteria:
- Chairman is nominated by the Chairperson of the African Union conference of Ministers in consultation with the eAfrica Commission
- 12 members, sponsoring or ordinary members elected by all members.
- nominee(s) shall also not be a member of the Board of Directors.

In addition to the Board of Directors and the Advisory Council, the AfNOG steering committee will oversee the allocation of surplus proceeds from registry operations. The AfNOG steering committee will solicit, evaluate and recommend grants to relevant social and/or technical initiatives and activities from the surplus proceeds. The Board will ultimately authorize the grants.

A Registrant Constituency made up of registrants will be introduced by the Board and will be consulted on policy issues. Liaisons to the Board of Directors would be established.

Expressions of interest have been received from prospective sponsors. These include AfTLD, AfriNIC, AfNOG, Afrispa, Association of African Universities (AAU), African Union and UN ECA. Other ccTLDs have been approached and have shown positive response. We are awaiting expressions of interest from individual ccTLDs.

The involvement of ccTLDs ensures a wealth of knowledge, experience and expertise in the operational and policy management of a TLD registry in the

Africa region is leveraged. Furthermore, representation in governance from successful African Internet and Information Technology organizations provides broad representation from the Pan-African community.

The mission of the DotAfrica Organization is:

- To sponsor, establish and operate a regional Internet namespace with global recognition and regional significance. The namespace is dedicated to the needs of the Pan-African Internet community.

- To reinvest surpluses in socio-technological advancement initiatives relevant to the Pan-African Internet community; and

- To operate a successful not-for-profit initiative that is a technically sound, leading edge TLD registry for the Pan-African Internet community.

As part of the mission, DotAfrica is committed to contributing to the development of Internet on the African continent and propose to re-invest back proceeds into the social and technological advancement initiatives within the community. A revenue allocation structure will be adopted by the DotAfrica registry to guarantee that a portion of revenues will be directly re-invested into the community through a grant program.

Openness and Transparency
The DotAfrica Organization intends to operate in an open and transparent manner.

The DotAfrica Organization will maintain a public Web site to post policies and related news to the community.

All Board meeting minutes will be publicly posted online. Formal Board meetings will also be open for observation by the public. The DotAfrica Organization intends to hold its Board meetings in conjunction with the AfNOG and AfriNIC meetings for the convenience of participants and to further encourage the participation of interested observers.

An open Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held during the annual AfNOG/AfriNIC meetings, which are attended by many leaders and active participants from the Internet community in the African region. This meeting will include an open comment session. Minutes of the AGM will also be made publicly available. Critical issues that affect the community (e.g. decision on surplus allocation) will also be open for public comment.

Notice for policy changes will be communicated through the website.

Initial Officers

Initial Board of directors will be nominated by the sponsoring members and each is appointed for a period of one or two years. At the end of the first year an election is held to replace the board from the entire membership.

The Advisory Council members will be elected by all members, except the Chairman who is nominated by the African Union Chairman of Ministerial ICT committee.

Other officers are being sought and discussions are ongoing on recruitment of key officer for the DotAfrica Organization. The staff is expected to be lean and not exceed 6 professionals during the three year plan.

Fiscal Information

We are in negotiations with potential Registry Operators with a plan of 150,000 domains in year 1, 200,000 domain name registrations in year 2 and 300,000 domain registration in the third year. The business plan will be based on these revenue forecast from registrations and costs of registry operation and service costs.

Public Policy Considerations

The Board of DotAfrica appreciates the importance of inclusion of nation states in decision making around public policy and proposes that an African Union Chairman of Ministerial ICT committee nominate the chairman of the Advisory Council thereby ensuring direct input from the policy makers in the region. This is private sector led initiative and the structures enable all Africans to participate in the initiative.

DotAfrica proposes to adapt where necessary the UDRP process of ICANN to resolve disputes.

Policy and Structural Organisation

Organisational governance policies will be formulated and maintained by the DotAsia Organisation. These would include for example:

- Membership Policies
- Election Policies
- Governance Structure Policies
- Surplus Proceeds Allocation Policies

Membership Policies would include items such as:

- Classes of Membership
- Membership Requirements
- Member Rights and Obligations

Election Policies would include items such as:

- Nomination Procedures
- Candidate Requirements
- Voting Procedures

Governance Structure Policies would include items such as:

- Board Structure and Makeup
- Board Decision Making Process
- Advisory Council Structure

Surplus Proceeds Allocation Policies would include items such as:

- Process for the Solicitation of Proceeds Allocation / Grants
- Areas for which surplus proceeds should be directed towards
- Frequency of Surplus Proceeds Allocation events

Communication Policies

- procedures for announcements of policies
- policy processes
- partnerships

Registry Operation
DotAfrica proposes to work with an experienced Registry Operator or Registrar with experience in Africa to provide leading edge registry services.