APrIGF Summary Report

Plenary 3: IDN governance and policy for an equitable and diverse multilingual Internet

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On the fair and equitable deployment of IDN, it's getting into full swing on the internet, and it benefits native communities. Last year, ICANN did launch a set of IDNs, ccTLDs, limited scripts and with some limitations. Now we are about to go into a much larger potentially deployment of IDN as part of the new gTLD program that might be approved at ICANN in the coming week or two.

The point of the session was to ask the question. We are actually looking at a large-scale deployment of IDN beyond just what happened last year and limited ccTLD area. Are there any things in the policy right now, as it stands at ICANN, and as we are about to approve, are there things that might limit what happens to the way in which it gets deployed? So it affects native communities adversely.

Along the way, a lot of policy changes were made, discussed over the last, especially four or five years since ICANN's interest in them, but some of them were adopted, many were not, the document has become 2,000 pages, so we have lots of things hidden in places that could ultimately not benefit the community that it was intended for, at least IDN will arrive, but not in a form that may not immediately and in a direct way, affect the communities that were poorer and really needed it. That was kind of the background to the session.

We had several people -- it was a large panel, we had a number of speakers, about six, and we talked about various different angles on this, included representations from China, Korea, Israel, Singapore and also APTLD, which is Asia Pacific top level domain name group, which is basically at the point the ccTLDs that have launched out of Asia, both the IDN and ASCII, so they had their view on this and also representation from Singapore.

The kind of difficulties relating to the issue at hand fell into two parts, two general categories. The first category was a bit more mundane, but still important and that fell into the category of the processes right now. Because IDN is largely being --previously it was done regionally by many countries, but now ICANN is taken over, so it is really an ICANN gain. So, in the last year of what has been happening in the IDN ccTLD launches so far, has there been any slowness in the process, has there been difficulties in the applications and so on and so forth? By the time they can get an IDN thing approved and put in the root, the processes that go on.

The two difficulties were pointed out.

a) Aside from Singapore basically pointed out that the application process for the.sg versions in native languages that are used in Singapore took a long time, when it should perhaps have been a much more straightforward process.

b) An idea from the APTLD group, the variant process. Although the ccTLDs were launched last year, they were launched in a somewhat limited way, because there is the issue of different

versions of the same word in different scripts. It is not a lose explanation of what variants are. In many of the languages, it's true, but ccTLDs launches were launched with the idea that we will worry about that later. There has been lots of committees and there has been -- the issues are quite limited like two or three issues only, but they have already been several committees and there are more committees and it has been taking a long time to get that right and it's still requesting on that was one aspect of the slowness.

The second and last category of what was discussed is broadly in the issue of when IDNs are going to be -- the remaining policy issues, if you read the guidebook very carefully, you'll find clauses and page this, that, deep down where things were written in one way before, but it's been changed because different people with powers, businesses, trademarks and so on. So, they have changed things and the current version that is about to go has many issues as such. The worst one is the one intended to protect the incumbent registries, which is that the incumbent registries, .com, et cetera, and the gTLD space, are now protected for sound, meaning and also visual similarity.

Early on, years ago, people agreed visual similarity should not be allowed across scripts, but not sound and meaning, but that has been changed back to the point where basically, if someone were to apply for a sound and meaning that is similar to a .com in some other language, there's so many words that have the same meaning, to some many different versions of the meaning that was discussed, so many different sounds like in Chinese, different thing that is could go back just to one sound, all that could be, just for a few thousand dollars, an applicant to get into the game. But a few thousand dollars can be objected by the incumbents. So nobody is going to apply for them.

This round, in effect, where a few hundred applicants are expected to apply of which only a small pool will be IDNs, because it costs a lot of money, and you are not getting too many applicants. So what's going to happen is the big incumbent registries probably won't even be competed on this, because no one takes the risk. They will end up protecting the sound and meaning versions of this. Once that happens, when the other 500 primarily ASCII English deployments go forward, they get approved over the next year or whatever, they would follow the same game and the same rule. They will say that we are incumbent registries and just applied for .sports, but now I can block anybody else from getting .sports in every other language or meaning thereof, .athletics or whatsoever. What happens by default could be this round pegged at 200,000 plus or more, real costs are going to be much higher, which only richer, non IDN native people can apply for, will end up getting all the best concepts in the world. People have a few years to think about the concepts.

What happens is ultimately we may not really have another round later on, all the best concepts are taken by on in IDN communities. Sure it will come out, but it will be sold by largely we are money corporations back to these countries. This is the real danger and this was discussed in many ways and I myself on a personal note, having been involved in inventing IDN in the early days as one of the people and the one who coined the term IDN. Although it is great, it may end up serving the wrong comment. Again, some words were used by various speakers, this is some kind of reverse imperialisation of languages, but this is just all hidden in the stuff in there. There's lots of stuff in the 2,000 pages that are hidden. They were written one way before, but they have changed. This is primarily the one that affects the most, in terms of the fair and equitable distribution of IDN.