



RWANDA INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM (RWIGF) 2014 REPORT

Gorilla Golf Hotel, Nyarutarama, Kigali | 30 September 2014

Theme: "Creating an Enabling Environment for the Development and Growth of Local Internet Content"



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1. Background

The Rwanda Internet Governance Forum (Rw-IGF) is a national multi-stakeholder platform established to bring together representatives from government, the private sector, civil society, and the technical community to discuss issues relating to Internet governance. Modelled on the global Internet Governance Forum (IGF) convened annually under the auspices of the United Nations, the Rw-IGF serves as Rwanda's contribution to shaping a coherent national approach to the governance and development of the Internet.

Internet governance, broadly understood, encompasses the policies, norms, rules, and practices that shape how the Internet is used, managed, and developed. In a country like Rwanda, where Internet access continues to expand rapidly, and the digital economy is a central pillar of the national vision for development, conversations about governance take on particular urgency. Questions about who creates content, in what languages, for which audiences, and under what conditions are not merely technical matters; they are deeply intertwined with issues of inclusion, economic opportunity, cultural expression, and national sovereignty in the digital age.

The 2014 edition of the Rw-IGF, the subject of this report, was convened against the backdrop of growing recognition that while Internet connectivity in Rwanda was improving, the country's presence in the global digital content landscape remained limited. The forum provided a timely opportunity for stakeholders to take stock of progress, examine persistent barriers, and collectively chart a path forward.

2. Overview of the Forum

The 2014 Rwanda Internet Governance Forum was held on Tuesday, 30 September 2014, at the Gorilla Golf Hotel in Nyarutarama, Kigali. The event drew 127 participants from across the public and private sectors, reflecting the broad, multi-stakeholder character that has come to define the Rw-IGF. Attendees included policymakers, telecommunications regulators, Internet service providers, content developers, academic researchers, civil society organisations, and representatives of the youth and technology entrepreneurship communities.

The day's programme was organised around panel discussions and open floor sessions. Panellists drawn from a cross-section of sectors were invited to share good practices, reflect on their own experiences, and contribute to a collective diagnosis of the challenges facing the development of local Internet content in Rwanda. The open and inclusive format encouraged frank exchange and ensured that voices beyond the usual institutional suspects had space to be heard.

The theme *"Creating an Enabling Environment for the Development and Growth of Local Internet Content"* was deliberately chosen to focus attention on the structural and systemic conditions needed to nurture a thriving local content ecosystem. Rather than debating whether local content mattered, a question whose answer was already well understood, the forum set out to examine what it would take to actually make it flourish.

3. Opening Remarks — Mr. Ghislain NKERAMUGABA, CEO, RICTA

Mr. Ghislain NKERAMUGABA opened the forum by welcoming participants and underscoring the importance of convening a national conversation on Internet governance at a time when Rwanda's digital ambitions were accelerating. He noted that the Rwanda Information and Communication Technology Association (RICTA), as the country's domain name registry and a key steward of Internet infrastructure, had a direct stake in seeing a healthy local content ecosystem take root. In his remarks, he drew attention to the still-limited volume of Rwandan content on the global Internet, framing it not as a failure but as an opportunity that the assembled

stakeholders were uniquely positioned to act on. He called on participants to move beyond diagnosis and use the forum to generate concrete, actionable commitments. Mr. NKERAMUGABA also acknowledged the role of the global IGF process in inspiring national-level dialogue, and expressed RICTA's commitment to continuing to support the Rw-IGF as a platform for inclusive, evidence-based policymaking. He encouraged candid exchanges throughout the day, reminding the room that the strength of the forum lay in the diversity of perspectives it brought together.

4. Guest of Honour's Remarks — Hon. Jean Philbert NSENGIMANA, Minister, MYICT

The Guest of Honour, Hon. Jean Philbert NSENGIMANA, Minister of Youth and Information and Communication Technology, brought the weight of government commitment to the forum's opening. He situated the day's theme firmly within Rwanda's broader national development agenda, noting that the Vision 2020 roadmap had identified ICT as a core driver of the transition to a knowledge-based economy and that local content was central to making that vision a lived reality for ordinary Rwandans.

The Minister acknowledged that infrastructure rollout, while impressive, was only meaningful if people found the Internet relevant and useful in their daily lives, and relevance was built through content. He spoke to the government's efforts to create a policy environment that supported innovation and investment in the digital sector. He signalled openness to feedback from the private sector and civil society on where the regulatory framework could be strengthened. Hon. NSENGIMANA also encouraged Rwanda's young people in particular to see content creation as a viable and valuable vocation, noting that the country's demographic profile was one of its greatest assets in building a dynamic digital economy. He formally declared the forum open and expressed confidence that the day's discussions would yield recommendations worthy of serious follow-up by all stakeholders.

5. Thematic Focus and Context

The development of local Internet content sits at the intersection of several policy priorities for Rwanda. The national broadband infrastructure has expanded considerably in recent years, and mobile Internet access in particular has grown at a notable pace. Yet connectivity without content that is relevant, accessible, and locally produced risks being a hollow achievement. People are most likely to use the Internet productively when they find information that speaks to their lives, needs, and language.

Several dimensions of the local content challenge were acknowledged as the forum opened. The volume of digital content originating from Rwanda remains small relative to the country's population and economic ambitions. Content in Kinyarwanda is particularly sparse despite the language being spoken by the overwhelming majority of Rwandans. The skills and resources required to produce quality digital content are unevenly distributed, and many potential content creators, including small enterprises, community organisations, and individual innovators, face barriers that range from cost and technical know-how to questions of intellectual property protection and commercial viability.

The forum also took note of the global policy moment. The transition of Internet governance responsibilities, including debates about the future of the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) stewardship and the role of multi-stakeholder versus intergovernmental models, formed an important backdrop to Rwanda's national deliberations. A country's ability to shape global Internet governance is, in part, a function of how actively it participates in these international processes, and participation begins with building a vibrant national conversation, exactly the kind the Rw-IGF was designed to foster.

6. Key Discussions and Panel Contributions

6.1 The State of Local Content in Rwanda

Panellists opened by taking stock of where things stood. The picture that emerged was one of genuine progress alongside persistent gaps. Rwanda had witnessed the emergence of a generation of young digital entrepreneurs, bloggers, developers, and media organisations building an online presence. Yet by most available measures, the proportion of globally accessible Internet content that originates from Rwanda remains extremely low, a challenge shared with much of sub-Saharan Africa.

The discussion highlighted that local content encompasses a wide range of categories, news and information, e-government services, educational materials, entertainment, e-commerce platforms, and more, and that progress has been uneven across these areas. E-government, driven by public investment, has moved furthest. Private sector content creation, particularly for mass audiences in Kinyarwanda, remains underdeveloped.

6.2 Infrastructure, Access, and Affordability

A recurring thread throughout the forum was the relationship between infrastructure, affordability, and content development. Several panellists noted that while Rwanda's national backbone and mobile coverage had expanded substantially, the cost of data remained a significant constraint for both content consumers and creators. For an individual or small enterprise considering whether to invest time and money in building a digital presence, the economics must make sense, and where data costs are high relative to income, they often do not.

Participants also discussed the importance of local hosting and Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) in improving both the performance and the cost profile of local digital services. When locally produced content is hosted locally and exchanged domestically rather than routed through distant international data centres, it loads faster and costs less to serve, a meaningful advantage in a bandwidth-constrained environment. Progress on Rwanda's IXP was acknowledged, with calls for continued investment to maximise its benefits for local content producers.

6.3 Skills, Capacity, and the Content Creation Ecosystem

The forum gave considerable attention to the question of human capital. Producing quality digital content at scale requires skills that cut across technical, creative, journalistic, and commercial domains. Participants observed that while ICT education had been integrated into Rwanda's school curriculum and a number of training institutions were producing graduates with relevant competencies, a gap remained between the skills being developed and those demanded by a dynamic, commercially oriented content ecosystem.

Several good practices were shared by panellists from organisations that had invested in training and mentorship for aspiring content creators. The importance of peer learning, incubation programmes, and collaboration between educational institutions and industry was highlighted. Participants also noted the value of making tools and platforms available in forms that are accessible to people with modest technical backgrounds, reducing the friction involved in getting content online.

6.4 Language, Relevance, and Cultural Dimension

One of the more substantive conversations of the day concerned the role of language in content development. The dominance of English in global Internet content represents a structural barrier for Kinyarwanda speakers who are not proficient in English, a significant proportion of Rwanda's population. Several panellists argued compellingly that investment in Kinyarwanda-language content was not simply a matter of cultural preference but an economic and developmental imperative. People engage more deeply with content in their own language, and digital services that speak to Rwandans in Kinyarwanda are more likely to achieve meaningful adoption.

The discussion also touched on the need for content that is genuinely relevant to Rwandan lives, concerns, and contexts beyond translation, a matter of editorial orientation and understanding of local audiences. Panellists cited examples of successful locally relevant services and noted that relevance, more than any other factor, drives organic usage and loyalty among users.

6.5 Policy, Regulation, and the Enabling Environment

True to the forum's theme, discussions turned to what governments and regulators can do to make local content development more likely to succeed. Participants acknowledged the Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority (RURA) as an active presence in shaping the telecommunications and digital policy environment, and credited a number of existing policy frameworks for laying useful groundwork. At the same time, there was candid acknowledgment that certain aspects of the regulatory environment remained uncertain or burdensome for emerging content businesses.

Incentives for local content investment, whether through fiscal measures, preferential treatment in public procurement, or targeted funding mechanisms, were discussed as potentially valuable tools. Panellists also raised the importance of clear and proportionate frameworks for issues such as online intellectual property protection, data privacy, and content liability. A legal environment that content creators can navigate with confidence is an important part of what makes a country "content-creator friendly."

6.6 The Role of the Private Sector and Investment

Private sector participants shared perspectives on the business models that had shown promise for local content enterprises and the financing landscape for early-stage digital ventures. The forum heard from those who had successfully monetised content through advertising, subscription, and service models, as well as those who had encountered difficulties in attracting investment and building sustainable revenue streams.

Mobile money and the growing prevalence of digital payments in Rwanda were highlighted as an important enabler of new content business models, particularly for micro-payment-based services. Participants encouraged greater collaboration between content businesses and the financial sector to develop payment solutions suited to the needs and habits of Rwandan Internet users.

7. Recommendations

The discussions throughout the day converged on a set of practical recommendations, directed at a range of stakeholders, to advance the development and growth of local Internet content in Rwanda:

- Government, RURA, and telecommunications operators should pursue measures to make data more affordable, including competition policy interventions and continued investment in the national backbone. More accessible data is a precondition for a larger, more active content-creating and content-consuming population.
- Public institutions and private actors alike should treat the production of quality content in Kinyarwanda as a strategic priority. This includes news, educational resources, government information, and entertainment. Support for Kinyarwanda natural language processing tools would further lower the barrier.
- Continued investment in Rwanda's Internet Exchange Point and local hosting infrastructure should be treated as a public good with economic returns. Incentives for local businesses to host content domestically would compound these benefits.

- The government and private sector should collaborate to design and fund programmes that equip aspiring content creators with practical skills. These should go beyond basic ICT literacy to cover content production, digital marketing, intellectual property management, and business development.
- RURA and relevant ministries should review the regulatory landscape with a view to reducing unnecessary barriers for content businesses. Clear, proportionate rules on intellectual property, privacy, and content liability would increase investor and creator confidence.
- Consideration should be given to fiscal incentives, grant mechanisms, or a dedicated content development fund to catalyse investment in local content. Models from comparable countries in the region and beyond could inform the design of such mechanisms.
- The public sector, as a major producer and consumer of digital content, can set standards and create demand. Strengthening the quality, accessibility, and interoperability of e-government content would benefit citizens and signal the value of local digital investment.
- The Rw-IGF should continue to serve as a feeder into regional and global IGF processes. Rwanda's perspectives on issues such as IANA stewardship, content regulation, and digital rights deserve to be heard in international forums, and active participation requires a well-organised national platform.

8. Conclusions

The 2014 Rwanda Internet Governance Forum demonstrated the value of bringing diverse stakeholders together to grapple openly with the challenges and opportunities of Internet governance at the national level. The 127 participants who gathered at the Gorilla Golf Hotel represented a broad cross-section of Rwanda's digital stakeholder community, and the quality of the discussions reflected both the depth of expertise in the room and the genuine commitment of those present to improving Rwanda's digital future.

The forum made clear that creating an enabling environment for local Internet content is not a task that falls to any single actor. It requires co-ordinated action across government, the private sector, civil society, and the technical community. Regulatory clarity, affordable connectivity, relevant skills, appropriate investment, and content that speaks genuinely to Rwandans in their own languages are all necessary ingredients. No single intervention will be sufficient on its own.

What the Rw-IGF provides is a space for exactly the kind of multi-stakeholder dialogue that such co-ordination requires. It is a place where those who make policy, those who build infrastructure, those who create content, and those who use it can speak frankly to one another, share what is working, and hold one another accountable for progress. The recommendations that emerged from the 2014 forum provide a concrete agenda for follow-up, and the commitment expressed by participants to continue the conversation is an encouraging sign for Rwanda's digital development trajectory.

As the Internet continues to evolve and its governance becomes ever more consequential, Rwanda's investment in inclusive, informed, and action-oriented national dialogue through platforms like the Rw-IGF becomes increasingly important — not only for the country itself, but as a contribution to the broader effort to ensure that the Internet serves the interests of people everywhere.