

Report on the Meeting of the Project Country Partners with Policy Makers

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Meeting on Internationalized Domain Names in Applications (IDNAs) for Nepali

Convener:

Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya(MPP)
Lalitpur, PatanDhoka
Nepal

Introduction:

With the internet boom and the availability of Free and Open Source Software, Nepal also has been more or less keeping pace with the localization theme and revolution of Information Communication Technology (ICTs) with the rest of the world. In less than a decade after which Unicode compliant fonts and keyboard drivers (2002) became available, we already have the privilege of being able to use a localized operating system (NepaLinux) with localized applications(email and internet chatting in Nepali to name a few) running on top of the system. Besides the localized operating system and the applications, with the development of useful utilities like the Spell Checker for Nepali, Font Conversion tools etc., we are all moving towards the creation of more and more content in our local languages, thus contributing towards the development of a knowledge base that can be utilized to the maximum for forming a well founded information society. Currently, in the technical context, by local language, we understand it to be Nepali in Nepal as it is the language that has a considerable works accomplished both from a technical and a linguistic perspective. But with time, it is expected that other non-Nepali languages used in Nepal also would take pace and go through similar developments.

Although localized technologies have been developed that provide an easy to understand and use environment for using ICTs, still internet access requires the typing of the domain names, for example, <http://mysansar.com> in English as the Domain Name System (DNS)is in Latin script which uses English conventions and abbreviations. However, lately, collective efforts have been put towards enabling Internationalized Domain Names in Applications (IDNAs). Basically, a domain name which is capable of encoding language written in other than Latin script is called Internationalized Domain Name (IDN) and IDNA is a proposed solution for internationalized domain names. At the higher level of understanding, it can be defined as a facilitating layer that takes the domain name in the local language as input, normalizes the input and converts into DNS compatible form. Ideally, what we are expecting via IDNA is that on typing माइसंसार.कम, we get to the page originally returned by the Universal Resource Locator (URL) mysansar.com.

Agendas of the meeting:

1. Discussion on the need and relevance of IDNA for Nepali.
2. Discussion on the probable challenges in due course of developing IDNA for Nepali.
 - a. Current character set being used for Nepali – limitations and complexities.
 - b. Alternatives for the currently used symbols – period (.), www
3. Summing up the efforts made for enabling IDNA by international and national bodies like Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), Internet Society (ISOC), Mercantile Communications Pvt. Ltd., Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya(MPP) etc.
4. Recommendations for way forward.

Date and venue:

March 24, 2009

Yalamaya Kendra, PatanDhoka

2 - 4 P.M

Expected participation:

Representatives from governmental and non-governmental bodies working in the policy making, advocacy, suggestions making and/or implementation levels.

Minutes of the meeting proceedings

On March 24, 2009, a meeting of the stakeholders of the Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) including those from the government and non-government sectors was held at Yalamaya Kendra, Lalitpur, PatanDhoka, Nepal.

The meeting proceedings are as follows:

1. Bal Krishna Bal, Project Manager, MPP, started the meeting by introducing the agendas of the meeting.
2. Mr. Basanta Shrestha, Senior Developer, MPP, made a presentation on IDN in Applications(IDNA) for Nepali starting from the basic concepts, gave an overview of the works currently being done in Nepal, listed the possible stakeholders of IDNA in Nepal and finally ended his talk by asking for general recommendations or suggestions for moving forward.
3. After the presentation, the floor was declared open for discussion. The discussion was basically centered on the following categories:

- a. IDN Labels and separators

It was agreed that we should study the conventions taken by other languages following the Devangari script. Discussions took place regarding what should be the alternatives for the english period(.) as well as the “www”. The general opinion was if we are comfortable and things are simple leaving these symbols intact and if this is the widely practised standard, we should go for it.

b. Translation/transliteration or inventing of new terminologies for the existing country code Top Level Domains (ccTLDs) and generic Top Level Domains (gTLDs)

Representatives from MPP informed the participants that currently they had just transliterated the list of ccTLDs and gTLDs, provided by Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) but this had to be discussed and further worked on under consensus of several other stakeholders, both from the government and non-government sectors. On this, the participants were not very convinced and opined that since this issue has far reaching consequences, it has to be finalized via wide consultation and conducting surveys of opinions with related stakeholders.

c. Identification of potential IDN Stakeholders in Nepal
Government sector :

- a) Ministry of Science and Technology
- b) Ministry of Information and Communication
- c) Nepal Telecommunications Authority
- d) High Level Commission for Information Technology
- d) Nepal Academy
- e) Central Department of Linguistics, Tribhuvan University

Non-governmental sector:

- a) Mercantile Communications Pvt. Ltd.
- b) Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya
- c) Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Kathmandu University
- c) Computer Association of Nepal
- d) Internet Society of Nepal
- e) Internet Service Providers Association of Nepal

International bodies:

- a) SAARC body looking over telecommunication issues
- b) ICANN communities

d. Formation of a IDN task force

The meeting unanimously agreed to form a IDN task force to work on the several IDN related issues that are unresolved at the moment. Such a task force could involve national and international experts besides the stakeholders to push works on IDN in Applications in Nepali. The meeting also agreed that the task force would work towards working on the terms of reference(TOR) as well as developing fund request proposals and approaching to the government bodies for the support. The meeting agreed that MPP should take the leading role for the task force creation and moving IDN related things ahead.

List of names of the participants of the meeting

1. Patrick A.V. Hall , Kathmandu University
2. Sanat Kumar Bista, Kathmandu University
3. Karun Dhungana, Computer Association of Nepal
4. Bijay Kumar Roy, Nepal Telecommunications Authority
5. Surendra Lal Hada, Nepal Telecommunications Authority
6. Arni Raj Manandhar, High Level Commission for Information Technology
7. Eswari Prasad Sharma, Mercantile Communications Pvt. Ltd.
8. Basanta Shrestha, Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya.
9. Bal Krishna Bal, Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya.