



TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE STUDY ON GOVERNANCE, OPERATIONS, AND GROWTH POTENTIAL OF THE .UG COUNTRY CODE TOP LEVEL DOMAIN (.UG CCTLD).

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The .UG country code Top-Level Domain (.UG ccTLD) is a critical national digital resource that supports Uganda's online ecosystem, including government services, private sector activities, and national digital identity. In line with global best practice, ccTLDs are considered public trust resources and must be administered in the interest of the local Internet community.

A well-governed and efficiently managed ccTLD is essential for advancing national digital sovereignty, strengthening trust in online services, and ensuring inclusive access to digital opportunities for citizens, businesses, and institutions. As such, in line with the Uganda Vision 2040, which identifies Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as a key enabler of socio-economic transformation, and the National Digital Transformation Roadmap, which prioritizes the development of robust digital infrastructure, trusted online services, and increased adoption of digital platforms, the .UG ccTLD constitutes a strategic component of Uganda's digital infrastructure, enabling local digital identity, supporting e-commerce, promoting local content, and enhancing Uganda's participation in the global digital economy.

The foundational principles for ccTLD management are articulated in the Domain Name System Structure and Delegation" (RFC 1591) and further reinforced by the Internet Domain Name System Structure and Delegation" (ICP-1). These frameworks emphasize that a ccTLD manager must: -

- a. Serve the interests of the local Internet community,
- b. Ensure equitable, honest, fair, and non-discriminatory access to domain services,
- c. Demonstrate technical and operational competence including long-term stability in the administration and management of the ccTLD responsibilities,
- d. The ccTLD Registry is a trustee for the delegated ccTLD, and has a duty to
- e. serve the local Internet community as well as the global Internet community
- f. Be locally present and accountable, and
- g. Operates with the confidence of Significantly Interested Parties, including government and the broader Internet community.

Historically, the management of the .UG ccTLD evolved through transitional arrangements. Initially administered by a volunteer technical manager (Mr. Randy Bush) based in the United States, responsibility was later transferred to local entities through the efforts of Computer Frontiers. This process culminated in the current arrangement, where Infinity Computers and

Communications Company Ltd operates the .UG ccTLD on behalf of Uganda Online Ltd, undertaking both policy and operational registry functions.

In 2003, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) conducted a nationwide survey on Internet development. While the findings indicated general satisfaction with the existing arrangement, several structural concerns were identified that relate directly to RFC 1591 and ICP-1 principles. These included: -

- a. High costs of domain registration and renewal, affecting equitable access,
- b. Concentration of control under a single operator, limiting competition and neutrality,
- c. Lack of a multi-stakeholder governance framework,
- d. Limited representation of the Ugandan Internet community in oversight and decision-making.

These concerns highlighted gaps in alignment with international best practices, particularly regarding community representation, accountability, and fairness in the administration of the .ug ccTLD national resource.

To address these issues, the 2013 .UG ccTLD Management Policy identified redelegation as a strategic priority area, with Section 2.6.2 of the policy providing for the transition of the .UG ccTLD from a privately registered company to a not-for-profit organization, consistent with global best practice for ccTLD governance. Furthermore, Section 3.1.3 mandated UCC to: -

- a. Provide regulatory oversight for accredited .UG domain registrars; and
- b. Support the establishment and operationalization of the not-for-profit entity, including financial assistance during its initial phase.

In July 2024, UCC established the .UG ccTLD Redelegation Technical Working Group (UCC-UG RTWG) to guide this transition. The Working Group was tasked with developing a comprehensive redelegation framework to strengthen governance, enhance accountability, and ensure alignment with international standards and public interest best practices

The UCC Board subsequently considered and endorsed the redelegation framework and roadmap in June 2025. However, preliminary assessments of existing documentation, combined with insights from a benchmarking mission to Kenya, revealed the need for more robust, evidence-based analysis. There is a need to demonstrate: -

- a. Broad-based support from Significantly Interested Parties (as required under RFC 1591),
- b. Institutional, technical, and financial capacity of the proposed management model,
- c. Clear governance structures that ensure accountability, transparency, and community participation,
- d. Alignment with national policy objectives and international obligations.
- e. Understanding of the changing digital landscape and emerging concerns such as geo politics – globally, regionally and nationally.

It is against this background that UCC seeks to partner with a competent team of Academicians (hereinafter referred to as the Collaborating Partner) to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the current governance framework for the .UG ccTLD, with a view to identifying and recommending an optimal, sustainable, and internationally compliant management model that serves the best interests of Uganda's Internet community. The study will ensure that any redelegation decision aligns with the principles of RFC 1591 and ICP-1, while fostering confidence among the Government of Uganda, local stakeholders, and the global Internet ecosystem.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to assess the governance, technical capacity, market performance, and stakeholder perceptions of the .UG country code top-level domain (ccTLD), in order to recommend an optimal, sustainable, and internationally compliant management and governance model aligned with the best interests of both the Ugandan and global Internet community, national development priorities, and consistent with RFC 1591 principles.

The study further seeks to generate robust, evidence-based insights to support decision-making on the future management and potential redelegation of the .UG ccTLD, while contributing to Uganda's digital transformation agenda, strengthening national digital sovereignty, and supporting the objectives of Uganda Vision 2040 and the National Digital Transformation Roadmap.

More specifically the study aims to: -

1. Document and analyze the evolution and current state of the .UG ccTLD Registry, including its historical, legal, administrative, and operational development, as well as governance arrangements, institutional roles, and policy frameworks, to inform the assessment of its suitability for future management and potential redelegation.
2. Assess the technical and operational capacity of the current .UG ccTLD Registry, including Domain Name System (DNS) infrastructure (availability, redundancy, security, Domain Name Service Security Extensions. (DNSSEC), registry systems, operational processes, business continuity, risk management, and human resource capacity, to determine its adequacy, resilience, and ability to support secure, scalable, and trusted digital infrastructure in line with national digital transformation priorities.
3. Engage and assess Significantly Interested Parties (SIPs) by mapping and consulting key stakeholders including Government Ministries, Departments (MDAs), and Agencies and Internet Service Providers (ISPs), registrars, private sector, academia, civil society, and end users to evaluate satisfaction, expectations, and confidence in the current registry, and to establish evidence of stakeholder support relevant to potential redelegation.
4. Benchmark the .UG ccTLD against regional and international best practices, including selected registries (e.g., .tz, .ke, .za), seek input from Regional and International

organizations like AFTLD and ICANN to assess governance models, institutional structures, oversight mechanisms, and policy frameworks, and to identify lessons applicable to Uganda.

5. Analyze market performance and growth potential of the .UG ccTLD, including registration trends, market size, penetration, and user segmentation, to identify opportunities for expanding adoption, supporting SMEs, digital entrepreneurship, and increasing Uganda's participation in the underserved markets in the digital economy.
6. Evaluate pricing, affordability, and accessibility of the .UG ccTLD, including comparison with other ccTLDs and Generic Top-Level Domains (gTLDs), assessment of affordability barriers, and review of registrar and reseller competitiveness, to determine their impact on uptake and retention.
7. Identify key drivers and barriers to adoption of the .UG ccTLD, including awareness, brand positioning, trust, competition with gTLDs (e.g., .com, .org), registration processes, and cost, to inform strategies for increasing adoption.
8. Assess financial sustainability and growth strategies of the .UG ccTLD, including analysis of revenue streams, cost structures, and operational efficiency, and identify opportunities for diversification, reinvestment, marketing, and long-term sustainability.
9. Identify key and emerging digital sovereignty concerns associated with technical, operational and policy aspects of ug. ccTLD and make recommendations to address the concerns
10. Recommend an appropriate governance and management model, based on evaluation of alternative options (e.g., not-for-profit, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), multi-stakeholder, or enhanced current model), supported by clear selection criteria, accountability mechanisms, risk assessment including global dynamics and aligned with stakeholder expectations and national development priorities.
11. Undertake a risk assessment of the implementation plan of proposed governance and management model and propose relevant mitigating measures.

3. SCOPE OF WORK AND COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

The Collaborating Partner shall undertake a comprehensive assessment of the governance, technical capacity, market performance, and stakeholder perceptions of the .UG ccTLD. The study shall employ a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research, supported by extensive stakeholder engagement.

In executing this assignment, the Collaborating Partner shall, in collaboration with UCC:

1. Conduct a desk review of initial or preparatory works done by UCC, relevant laws, policies, regulations, UCC guidelines, sector reports, academic literature, and international best practices relating to ccTLD governance, technical operations, market performance, pricing, and sustainability, including alignment with RFC 1591, ICP-1 requirements.
2. Design, pre-test, and implement surveys targeting domain registrants, potential users (individuals, SMEs, startups, government entities), registrars, and resellers to assess usage patterns, awareness, adoption drivers, and barriers.
3. Conduct Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with regulators, UCC officials, registrars, ISPs, tech companies, government agencies, civil society, and other stakeholders to understand operational, regulatory, and governance perspectives.
4. Facilitate Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with domain users and potential adopters across selected regions to explore perceptions of trust, relevance, affordability, accessibility, and satisfaction with the .UG ccTLD ecosystem.
5. Analyze DNS infrastructure, registry systems, operational processes, business continuity, risk management, human resource capacity, technical expertise, and organizational structure to evaluate technical and operational capacity.
6. Analyze market and operational data, including domain registration and renewal trends, churn rates, market segmentation, adoption drivers, and financial sustainability. Assess pricing structures, affordability, and competitiveness of the registrar and reseller ecosystem.
7. Assess regulatory, pricing, and competitive frameworks to identify compliance gaps, enforcement challenges, and areas requiring regulatory adaptation to support growth and sustainability and equitable access. of the .UG ccTLD.
8. Co-develop empirically grounded recommendations on governance and management models (e.g., not-for-profit, Public - Private Partnerships (PPPs), multi-stakeholder, or enhanced current model), supported by clear evaluation criteria and aligned with stakeholder expectations, national interests, and public interest requirements.
9. Participate in validation workshops and stakeholder engagements to present findings, obtain feedback, and refine recommendations. Support knowledge transfer and dissemination of study outputs.
10. Develop a practical redelegation and transition roadmap, outlining institutional arrangements, legal and regulatory considerations, implementation steps, timelines, and risk mitigation measures.
11. Prepare an Executive policy brief of the recommendations to facilitate engagements at policy and wider government level

4. STUDY DELIVERABLES

The Collaborating Partner shall submit the following deliverables for review and approval by UCC; -

1. Inception Report, detailing research design, methodology, work plan, stakeholder mapping, timelines, and draft data collection instruments, including a pre-test report.
2. Stakeholder Consultation Report, summarizing insights from KIIs, FGDs, and other engagements, highlighting perceptions of governance, operational performance, pricing, and market dynamics.
3. Draft Study Report and Presentation Materials; presenting preliminary findings, analysis, and proposed recommendations, accompanied by presentation materials for UCC and stakeholder validation.
4. Final Study Report and Knowledge Outputs, incorporating feedback from validation sessions, cleaned datasets, analytical outputs in editable formats, and at least two publishable policy or academic papers derived from the study.
5. Executive Policy brief with recommended model and costed implementation road map.

5. TIMELINE AND FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

The study shall be completed within a maximum of Six (6) calendar months from the commencement date. Funding and disbursement arrangements shall be guided by the collaborative research framework and contractual provisions, subject to satisfactory completion and approval of agreed milestones and deliverables.

6. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE COLLABORATING PARTNER

The Collaborating Partner shall demonstrate strong academic, technical, and sector-specific expertise to ensure credible, evidence-based, and policy-relevant delivery of the study objectives. Applications may be submitted by individual academicians, academic research teams, faculties, schools, or consortia of institutions.

6.1 Collaborating Partner Level Qualifications

1. Academic and Research Credibility: Demonstrated expertise in ICT, digital infrastructure, telecommunications policy, Internet governance, or related fields, supported by peer-

reviewed publications and applied research outputs relevant to ccTLDs or Internet governance.

2. **Relevant Sector Experience:** At least five (5) years of experience conducting research, market assessments, or regulatory impact studies in the communications or Internet governance sector. Experience with ccTLDs or TLD management is an advantage.
3. **Collaborative Research Capacity:** Proven ability to work collaboratively with regulators, policymakers, industry stakeholders, and civil society actors, including experience in joint research initiatives or commissioned studies for public sector institutions. Partnership among different Universities will be an asset.
4. **Methodological Strength:** Demonstrated capacity to design and implement mixed-methods research, including surveys, qualitative interviews, stakeholder consultations, economic and financial analysis, and policy or regulatory assessments with the ability to generate actionable and decision-oriented outputs.
5. **Institutional Affiliation and Stability:** Lead Collaborating Partner must be affiliated with a legally registered and accredited academic or research institution. For consortium applications, clear governance arrangements and institutional commitments must be demonstrated.
6. **Regional and International Perspective:** Experience in comparative or benchmarking studies, ccTLD governance, Internet policy, or digital services in Africa or comparable jurisdictions is an advantage particularly where such experience supports policy reform or institutional transition processes.

6.2 Individual Team Qualifications

The collaborating partner research team shall comprise four (4) key professionals with complementary skills. Minimum requirements include:

1. **Team Leader / Lead Collaborating Partner**
 - a. **Qualifications:** PhD in ICT, Telecommunications, Public Policy, Economics, Media Studies, or a related field
 - b. **Experience:** Minimum 10 years of academic or applied research experience in Internet governance, TLD management, or ICT policy
 - c. **Publications:** At least 5 peer-reviewed publications relevant to ICT, Internet governance, or digital policy
 - d. **Role:** Overall coordination, methodological oversight, quality assurance, synthesis of findings, and leadership of policy and regulatory recommendations
2. **Technical and DNS Expert**

- a. Qualifications: Master’s degree in Telecommunications, ICT, Computer Science, or related field
 - b. Experience: At least 7 years’ experience in DNS operations, Registry systems, or Internet infrastructure
 - c. Role: Evaluate technical capacity, assess DNS operations, Registry systems, security, redundancy, and technical sustainability
3. Stakeholder and Consumer Research Specialist
- a. Qualifications: Master’s degree in social sciences, Communications, ICTs, Marketing, or a related field
 - b. Experience: At least 5 years’ experience in surveys, focus group discussions, audience research, or stakeholder engagement
 - c. Role: Design and implement surveys, focus groups, and interviews; assess adoption, awareness, perceptions, and satisfaction among domain users and potential users
4. Financial and Market Analyst
- a. Qualifications: Master’s degree in economics, Finance, Entrepreneurship, Business Administration, or a related field
 - b. Experience: At least 7 years’ experience in market analysis, financial modeling, revenue assessment, or business sustainability studies
 - c. Role: Assess market performance, pricing, revenue streams, financial sustainability, and economic impact of the .UG ccTLD.

7. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Applications will be evaluated based on:

1. Technical and Academic Merit: Assessment of the applicant’s understanding of the study objectives, clarity and coherence of the proposed methodology, and appropriateness of data collection and analysis tools, including alignment with the requirements for governance assessment and potential redelegation.
2. Relevant Experience and Track Record: Demonstrated experience in conducting similar studies in ccTLDs, ICT governance, digital services, or related sectors, including quality and relevance of previous research outputs, particularly those informing policy, regulatory, or institutional reform.
3. Team Composition and Competence: Qualifications, expertise, and complementarity of the proposed team, including technical, regulatory, financial, and stakeholder engagement competencies required to deliver the study.
4. Collaborative Research Capacity: Demonstrated ability to engage effectively with regulators, policymakers, industry stakeholders, and other actors, and to translate research

findings into actionable policy recommendations. Experience in multi-stakeholder or public sector research engagements will be an added advantage.

5. Methodology and Implementation Approach: Feasibility, realism, and sequencing of the proposed work plan, including stakeholder engagement strategy, data collection approach, and alignment with timelines and deliverables.
6. Financial and Implementation Feasibility: Realism and clarity of the proposed budget, alignment with the methodology and deliverables, and value for money.

8. REPORTING AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Collaborating Partner shall report to UCC through a designated Contract Manager. Overall oversight shall be provided by the Director responsible for ICT and Research to ensure alignment with UCC's strategic and regulatory priorities.

9. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY, DISCLOSURE, AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All data, instruments, analytical outputs, and reports produced under this study shall remain the property of the Uganda Communications Commission. The Collaborating Partner shall sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement and shall ensure confidentiality and secure handling of all study-related information.