



## **16<sup>TH</sup> EDITION OF THE WEST AFRICAN INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM**

**THEME: Disruptive Technologies: How Far, Thus Far'**

**HYBRID SESSION**

**Dakar, 11–12 JULY 2024**

**COMMUNIQUE**

**[ORIGINAL VERSION: ENGLISH]**

We, the participants at the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of the West African Internet Governance Forum (WAIGF), meeting in Dakar and online, on 11 and 12 July 2024, on behalf of the Internet governance bodies of the following fifteen (15) Member States: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo;

With the participation and support of the following partners: ECOWAS Commission, UN Internet Governance Forum Secretariat, Internet Society, ICANN, IGFSA, Yango, Senegal Ministry of Communication, Telecommunications, and Digital Affairs, Senegal Posts and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (ARTP); Senegal Universal Service Fund for Telecommunications Development (FDSUT) of Senegal and other stakeholders of Senegal Internet Ecosystem;

- Recalling the outcomes of previous editions of the West African Internet Governance Forum, held respectively in Accra, Dakar, Lagos, Freetown, Abidjan, Abuja, Niamey, Cotonou, Ouagadougou, Banjul, Accra & Abidjan as well as online;
- Reminding the collective efforts towards addressing Internet governance issues in the region;
- Recognizing the potential for disruptive technologies to foster socio-economic development across West Africa;
- Reaffirming the commitment of ECOWAS in coordinating the digital transformation within the region, as well as the commitment of relevant partners in supporting inclusive dialogue on digital transformation and Internet governance;
- Recognizing the importance of promoting digital literacy and ensuring access to affordable and secure digital infrastructure for socio-economic development, particularly in rural areas and for marginalized groups;
- Welcoming the proven involvement of diverse stakeholders, including civil society, governments, academia, and the private sector, in addressing the digital challenges facing West Africa;

- Recognizing the importance of building a more inclusive Internet through new Generic top-level domains (gTLDs) in Africa and the importance of having African actors managing new gTLDs;
- Recognizing that disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) are undeniably essential foundations of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR);
- Acknowledging the key role played by AI stakeholders and legislators in formulating regulations aiming to build a resilient Internet ecosystem;
- Recognizing that West Africa's youthful labor force remains untapped due to insufficient qualifications for the digital age;
- Perceiving that despite the challenges, risks, and ethical concerns related to emerging technologies, the bright opportunities ahead offer substantial benefits, particularly in terms of innovation;
- Acknowledging that the West Africa Internet Governance Forum (WAIGF) has shown resilience since its inception in 2008 despite the geopolitical challenges facing the community, and has played an essential role in advancing multistakeholder Internet governance;
- Further acknowledging the continuous commitment of the United Nations, ECOWAS Commission, and other partners towards supporting WAIGF's goals of capacity building, digital transformation, and contribution to socio-economic growth across the region.

**1) Report that:**

- a) The host country of the 17th edition of the Forum in May 2025 will be announced by ECOWAS Commission;
- b) The Parliamentarians Track, the West African School on Internet Governance (WASIG), and the West African Youth IGF will be organized in preparation for the WAIGF.

**2) Recommend the following:**

**a) Digital Connectivity, AI & Emerging Technologies**

- i. Call on Member States to bridge the digital gap by urgently working to promote digital literacy, and to guarantee cyberspace security and users' confidence, leveraging Emerging Technologies such as AI for development;
- ii. Urge Member States to build capacity for youth, people living in rural areas, and other marginalized groups, utilizing disruptive technologies for enhanced learning and development opportunities;
- iii. Encourage the creation of favorable environments for creation of job and wealth based on emerging technologies, by fostering innovation in Digital Connectivity, AI, and other disruptive technologies;

- iv. Encourage Member States to promote data and cooperate with legislators to develop an innovative-friendly legal framework supporting the advancement of Digital Connectivity, AI, and Emerging Technologies for sustainable development;
- v. Encourage Member States to foster multi-stakeholder participation in Internet governance forums and to contribute meaningfully to the dialogue on the Global Digital Compact and the Summit of the Future for the consideration of the realities and challenges faced by stakeholders in the West Africa region;
- vi. Emphasize the importance of enhancing intra-regional connectivity and implementing measures to boost Internet traffic exchange, including the enforcement of the ECOWAS Regulation on roaming to promote regional integration;
- vii. Urge Member States to implement programs focusing on the Universal Acceptance of domain names and email addresses promoting Internet accessibility regardless of the user's language.

**b) Digital Economy & e-Governance**

- i. Call upon Member States to establish legal frameworks and protocols promoting digital economy and e-governance development and address the issue of data ownership resulting from disruptive technologies;
- ii. Encourage Member States to make significant investments in human capacity to prepare the digital future of the region ensuring adaptability to disruptive technologies;
- iii. Encourage Member States to involve all stakeholders in fostering the development and adoption of emerging technologies, guided by high quality scientific research, analysis, and assessment of the local context;
- iv. Urge Member States to establish legal and regulatory frameworks enabling independent and effective verification of respect for human rights in the development, deployment, and use of disruptive technologies;
- v. Encourage Member States to continue civic education and sensitization efforts to ensure good digital hygiene, addressing the challenges associated with disruptive technologies;
- vi. Urge Member States to improve and harmonize data governance related regulations, particularly those concerning data protection and privacy, in the context of disruptive technologies;
- vii. Invite Member States to develop public policies that include good governance and transparency through e-government and open data, leveraging disruptive technologies for better service delivery;
- viii. Encourage Member States to ratify and implement the African Union Malabo Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection, ensuring robust frameworks for managing the implications of disruptive technologies.

### **c) On Digital Inclusion & Innovation**

- i. Urge Member States to establish new players, including companies that target remote areas and local start-ups, to leverage disruptive technologies for greater reach and impact in all sectors, especially in health and agriculture;
- ii. Encourage Member States to promote local investment and distribution of spectrum for community networks, as well as to develop a regulatory framework governing these networks and their operation, ensuring they harness the potential of disruptive technologies;
- iii. Urge Member States to bridge the digital gap through sensitization, education, and capacity-building on the Internet and its ecosystem, focusing on the transformative power of disruptive technologies;
- iv. Encourage Member States to collaborate with local entrepreneurs to create systems that are interoperable with government platforms, making data management processes more reliable and efficient through disruptive technologies;
- v. Invite Member States to establish universal service funds and, where these are not yet in place, promote their creation to accelerate the adoption of disruptive technologies. For those that already have such funds encourage the promotion of accountability using disruptive technologies to enhance transparency and effectiveness;
- vi. Call on Member States to create a strong economic base that boosts innovation, job creation, and foreign investment in technology industries, with a particular emphasis on the opportunities presented by disruptive technologies;
- vii. Encourage Member States to shape the digital future through an enabling and inclusive environment that embraces the potential of disruptive technologies for development and progress.

### **d) Global Coordination & Regional Cooperation for Digital Policy**

- i. Reaffirm the necessity for meaningful engagement in global discussions, particularly on the Global Digital Compact and the UN Vision 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring that the needs and priorities of Africa are integrated;
- ii. Call upon West African States to actively collaborate with global stakeholders and advocate for the inclusion of regional perspectives in the forthcoming Summit of the Future;
- iii. Urges Member States to strengthen partnership with civil society and the private sector to support capacity building and create the infrastructure necessary for digital sovereignty and resilience across Africa.

### **e) Cybersecurity & AI**

- i. Emphasize on the critical role of AI in enhancing cybersecurity capabilities, particularly in detecting and preventing cyber threats;
- ii. Urge Member States to invest in AI research and infrastructure to bolster national cybersecurity efforts and to adopt measures that address the gaps in digital infrastructure and data management across the region;

- iii. Call upon stakeholders to collaborate on building capacity and promoting awareness of cybersecurity best practices to ensure the protection of critical data and infrastructure.

**f) Parliamentarians Collaboration for Advancing Internet Governance**

- i. Encourage parliamentarians to continue playing an active role in shaping policies that protect digital rights, strengthen cybersecurity, and promote digital inclusion in collaboration with national and regional stakeholders;
- ii. Inform Member States about the establishment of the West Africa Parliamentary Network on Internet Governance (WAPNIG), which aims to promote dialogue among parliamentarians on digital policy and governance issues and to develop inclusive and future oriented legislative frameworks;
- iii. Call for participation of parliamentarians in discussing the Global Digital Compact to ensure that regional legislative frameworks are aligned with global standards and best practices.

**Dakar, Senegal - Hybrid July 12, 2024**

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