West African
Internet Governance
Forum **2025**

17TH EDITION OF THE WEST AFRICAN INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM

Building a *Resilient, Inclusive, and Safe Digital Future* for West Africa

May 19 –23, 2025   Abuja, Nigeria

ECOWAS
CEDEAO

Federal Republic
of Nigeria

For more info: Visit: http://WAIGF.ecowas.int or mail info@waigf.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025 edition of the West African Internet Governance Forum (WAIGF) took place from 21 to 23 May in Abuja, Nigeria, under the theme "Building a Resilient, Inclusive, and Safe Digital Future for West Africa." The event brought together a total of 1,551 participants, including 569 individuals physically present and 982 who joined virtually. This high level of participation reflects the continued relevance of digital governance in West Africa and the region's growing engagement in shaping its digital future.

Delegates attended from all 15 West African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. In addition to regional representation, participants connected from Switzerland, France, Malta, Russia, China, and other countries, affirming the international interest in West Africa's digital priorities.

A total of 352 individuals completed formal registration through the WAIGF platform. Over three days, the forum hosted 59 sessions conducted in English and French with full interpretation services. These included high-level panels, workshops, stakeholder round-tables, and cross-track engagements. In total, 147 speakers were featured, representing governments, international organizations, the private sector, civil society, academia, and youth-led initiatives.

The structure of WAIGF 2025 was built around four main components. The West African School on Internet Governance (WASIG) gathered alumni for an advanced policy practicum focusing on West Africa's positions in global processes such as WSIS+20, the Global Digital Compact, and NetMundial+10. Four working groups developed draft recommendations on themes including AI, data governance, multistakeholderism, and digital rights.

The West African Parliamentary Network on Internet Governance (WAPNIG) brought together 25 members of parliament and legislative advisors from 9 countries. Their discussions addressed digital sovereignty, legal harmonization, data protection, and emerging issues such as AI regulation. The track concluded with the endorsement of the Abuja Declaration and a shared call to integrate Internet governance into national policy and budgeting frameworks.

The Youth IGF engaged young professionals and students in dialogue on access, safety, entrepreneurship, and policy participation. It provided a platform for youth-led sessions and direct interaction with decision-makers, resulting in a joint communiqué delivered to the broader forum.

The WAIGF Main Forum included cross-cutting sessions on public digital infrastructure (DPI), regional and cross-border data flows, multilingual Internet access, cybersecurity, climate-resilient connectivity, and the role of artificial intelligence in sustainable development. These discussions involved multiple stakeholder groups and produced a number of forward-looking recommendations.
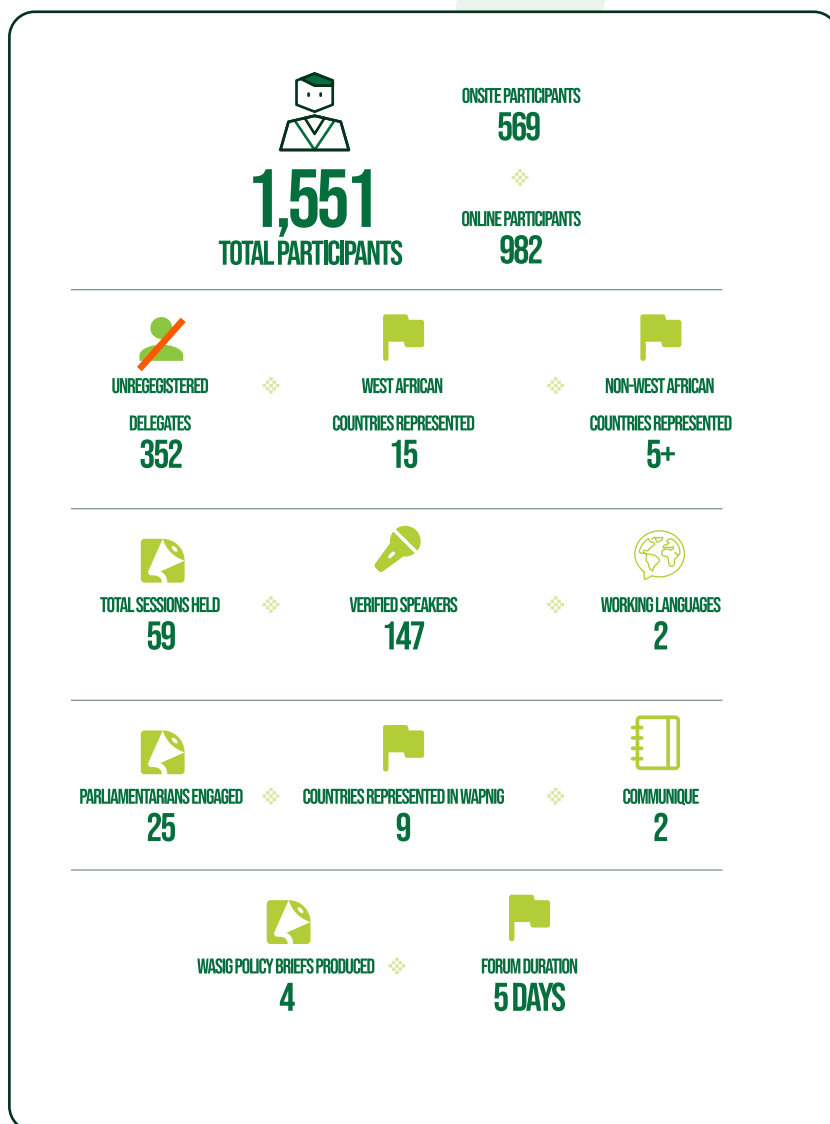
Overall, WAIGF 2025 reaffirmed the region's commitment to inclusive and rights-based digital development. Key outcomes included proposals for a harmonized digital policy framework for West Africa, dedicated funding for Internet governance at the national level, enhanced participation of youth and marginalized communities in decision-making processes, regional investments in infrastructure and AI literacy, and the consolidation of national and regional multistakeholder platforms.

The event was organized in partnership with the ECOWAS Commission, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the United Nations, the Internet Society, the Internet Society Foundation, the IGF Support Association (IGFSA), the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), IXPN (Internet Exchange Point of Nigeria), the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), ICANN, META, the Diplo Foundation, Paradigm Initiative, the Ndukwe-Kalu Foundation, the Africa Center for Digital Transformation, the Nigeria Internet Registration Association (NiRA), and the Internet Society Youth Standing Group

The outcomes of WAIGF 2025 are expected to inform upcoming IGF processes at the African IGF in Dar es Salaam, the Global IGF in Oslo and broader continental initiatives under the African Union Digital Strategy and the implementation of the Global Digital Compact.

✤ Introduction

1,551
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

ONSITE PARTICIPANTS
569

ONLINE PARTICIPANTS
982

UNREGEGISTERED DELEGATES	WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES REPRESENTED	NON-WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES REPRESENTED
352	**15**	**5+**

TOTAL SESSIONS HELD	VERIFIED SPEAKERS	WORKING LANGUAGES
59	**147**	**2**

PARLIAMENTARIANS ENGAGED	COUNTRIES REPRESENTED IN WAPNIG	COMMUNIQUE
25	**9**	**2**

WASIG POLICY BRIEFS PRODUCED	FORUM DURATION
4	**5 DAYS**

The West African Internet Governance Forum (WAIGF) is the region's principal platform for inclusive dialogue and cooperation on digital policy. Since its inception in 2008, it has fostered multistakeholder engagement across government, civil society, the private sector, academia, and the technical community to address the governance challenges and opportunities posed by digital transformation.

The 2025 edition was held in Abuja, Nigeria, from 19 to 23 May. It coincided with key global developments, including preparations for the WSIS+20 review, the finalization of the Global Digital Compact, and discussions under the NetMundial+10 process. These agendas provided strategic alignment and reinforced the relevance of the Forum in shaping West Africa's contributions to global digital cooperation. Organized under the theme "Building a Resilient, Inclusive, and Safe Digital Future for West Africa," the Forum featured four dedicated tracks: the West African School on Internet Governance (WASIG), the Parliamentarian Network on Internet Governance (WAPNIG), the Youth IGF, and the Main Forum. This structure allowed for thematic focus while encouraging inter-track dialogue and coherence across sessions.

The Forum adopted a hybrid format, combining physical presence with virtual participation to enhance regional access. Interpretation was provided in both English and French. The programme included plenaries, policy labs, technical workshops, and collaborative working groups covering areas such as artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, data flows, multilingualism, and sustainable digital development.

Participation Snapshot

WAIGF 2025 was convened by the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria through the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), in collaboration with the ECOWAS Commission, and supported by a broad coalition of regional and international partners. These included the United Nations, Internet Society, Internet Society Foundation, IGF Support Association (IGFSA), Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), ICANN, META, Diplo Foundation, Paradigm Initiative, the Ndukwe-Kalu Foundation, the Africa Center for Digital Transformation, the Nigeria Internet Registration Association (NiRA), and the ISOC Youth Standing GroupThe Forum contributed meaningfully to regional consensus-building and positioned West Africa as an informed and proactive actor in global digital governance discussions.

WAIGF 2025 brought together a total of 1,551 participants, including 569 onsite aendees and 982 who joined virtually. This strong turnout reflects the Forum's continued importance as a space for inclusive regional dialogue on digital governance. Of the total participants, 352 completed the official registration process through the WAIGF platform. Many onsite participants, particularly those from government and institutional delegations, were present but not individually registered

All fifteen West African countries were represented, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. International engagement also came from countries such as Swierland, France, Malta, Russia, and China, underscoring the global relevance of the region's digital policy discourse.

According to registration data, male participants constituted the majority, with 888 entries, while 401 identified as female and 2 preferred not to specify. The age distribution showed that over 60 percent of participants were under the age of 36, with 253 aged 18–25 and 530 aged 26–35. This demographic profile highlights the central role of young people in shaping digital futures in the region.

Participants came from a broad spectrum of stakeholder groups. Government actors were the most represented, followed by civil society, the private sector, youth and students, and academia. Additional participation came from the technical community, development organizations, and the media. This wide representation helped ensure that the Forum maintained its multistakeholder character and that policy discussions were grounded in diverse perspectives and lived experiences.

1,551
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

ONSITE PARTICIPANTS
569

ONLINE PARTICIPANTS
982

UNREGEGISTERED
DELEGATES
352

WEST AFRICAN
COUNTRIES REPRESENTED
15

NON-WEST AFRICAN
COUNTRIES REPRESENTED
5+

MALE PARTICIPANTS (ESTIMATED)
1,067

FEMALE PARTICIPANTS (ESTIMATED)
482

PREFER NOT TO SAY
2

PARTICIPANTS UNDER AGE 36 (EST.)
~61%

TOP STAKEHOLDER GROUPS
GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY, PRIVATE SECTOR,
YOUTH, ACADEMIA

West African School on Internet Governance (WASIG

The 2025 edition of the West African School on Internet Governance (WASIG) was held in Abuja from 19 to 21 May as the opening segment of WAIGF 2025. This year's edition marked a strategic evolution in the format of the School. Departing from its traditional training approach, WASIG 2025 was designed as a practicum for advanced fellows and alumni, focused on producing concrete policy proposals that respond to current global governance processes. The theme of the edition: "Building Strategic Capacity for Regional Influence in Global Digital Policy" reflected its core mission: preparing regional actors to actively contribute to the WSIS+20 Review, the Global Digital Compact (GDC), and the NetMundial+10 initiative
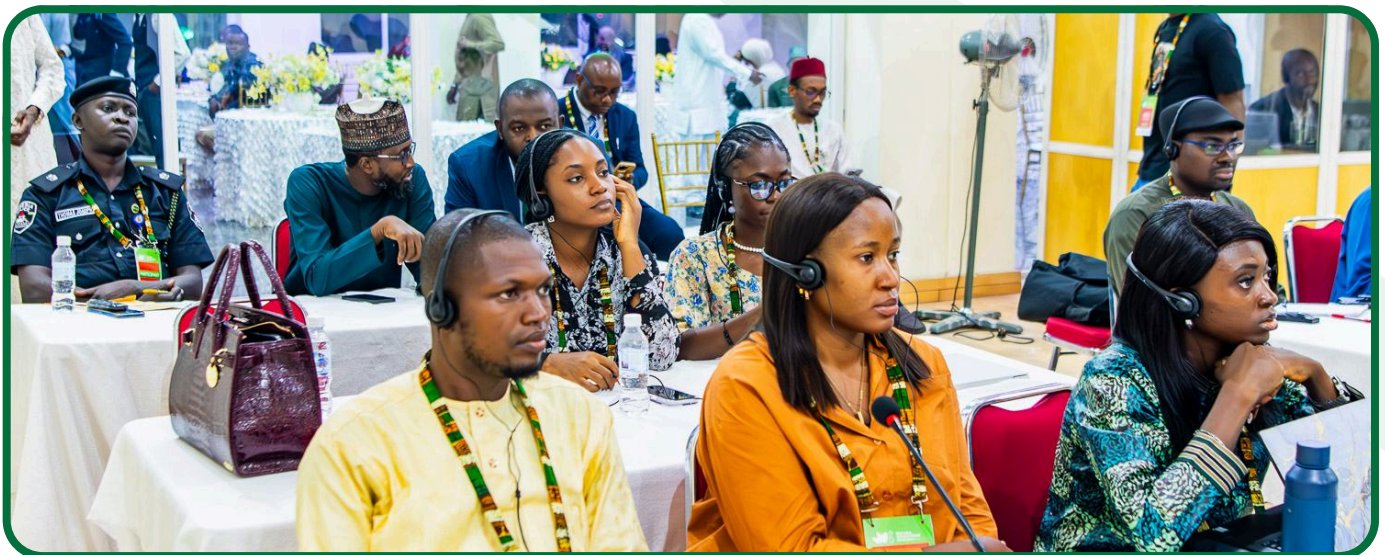
A total of 39 participants took part in the 2025 WASIG practicum, including 24 men and 15 women. Fellows came from 12 West African countries, with notable representation from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, The Gambia, Togo, Mali, and Niger. The stakeholder breakdown was weighted toward government participants, who represented 60% of the cohort, followed by civil society at 25%, academia at 10%, and the private sector and technical community at 5%. This composition reflected the School's deliberate shift toward building capacity among policy-shaping institutions while retaining the multistakeholder character at its core.

The practicum began with three foundational sessions designed to build a shared understanding of current global policy debates. The first, titled "AI in Action: Understanding the Technology, Governance, and Global Stakes," was delivered by Sorina Teleanu of DiploFoundation. It unpacked key terms and governance dilemmas around artificial intelligence, seing the tone for substantive engagement. The second session, led by Folake Olagunju of the ECOWAS Commission, was titled "Inside ECOWAS: Understanding the Policy-Making Process." This session clarified how policy instruments are formulated and adopted at regional level and how fellows could position themselves to contribute meaningfully to ECOWAS digital strategies. The third session focused on regional good practices and was delivered by Emmanuel Vitus. Titled "AI Strategies in West Africa: Lessons and Gaps," it highlighted national initiatives in Ghana, Senegal, Togo, and Côte d'Ivoire while encouraging fellows to identify regional alignment opportunities

Building on this knowledge base, fellows were grouped into four teams to simulate a high-level ECOWAS digital policy task force. Each team was given a scenario aligned with one of the three major global processes under review in 2025: WSIS+20, the Global Digital Compact, and NetMundial+10. Teams were tasked with developing a 1-page policy brief, stakeholder mapping, and a 7-minute advocacy pitch. They also created unique team names and slogans to reflect their vision. One group, "Digisphere ECOWAS," developed a GDC-aligned brief on digital rights, gender inclusion, and governance transparency. Another group, "One Digital West Africa," focused on institutional convergence and AU-ECOWAS policy coherence. A third team tackled the post-WSIS+20 landscape, emphasizing local content and regional research capacity. The final group focused on multistakeholder governance, drawing on the São Paulo Multistakeholder Guidelines from NetMundial+10 to propose new frameworks for ECOWAS member states

To support this work, high-level facilitators and mentors were mobilized. These included Dr. Jimson Olufuye, former Chair of the African ICT Alliance; Professor A.K. Oloyede, ICANN NomCom member and registrar expert; and senior staff from ECOWAS, NITDA, and GIZ. Faculty provided strategic guidance on how to frame briefs, articulate regional priorities, and align outputs with institutional agendas. The culminating session featured a simulated ECOWAS Council policy presentation, with each group pitching their proposals before a jury of senior advisors and peer reviewers. Fellows received feedback on both content and delivery, with two teams earning special mentions for clarity of vision and policy innovation.

Feedback collected from participants at the end of the practicum was overwhelmingly positive. Many highlighted the value of simulation-based learning, real-time group drafting, and exposure to negotiation formats. Several participants emphasized that this was their first experience producing structured policy documents with real institutional relevance. Recommendations for improvement included extending the program by one or two additional days, enhancing logistical coordination, and providing structured follow-up and mentorship after the event.

West African
Internet Governance
Forum—2025

ECOWAS

Federal Republic
of Nigeria

WASIG 2025 reaffirmed the strategic potential of alumni-centered, practice-oriented capacity development. It demonstrated that when given the tools, structure, and opportunity, regional actors are capable not only of participating in global discussions but of influencing them. With its advanced format and focus on applied outcomes, WASIG 2025 served as a model for how West Africa can strengthen its voice in digital governance while cultivating the next generation of regional leaders.

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
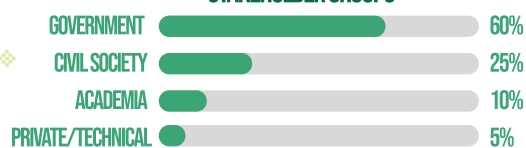**39**

MALE PARTICIPANTS
24

FEMALE PARTICIPANTS
15

WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES REPRESENTED
12 WEST AFRICAN STATES

STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

GOVERNMENT	60%
CIVIL SOCIETY	25%
ACADEMIA	10%
PRIVATE/TECHNICAL	5%

SESSIONS DELIVERED
6

EXPERT FACILITATORS
482

PRACTICUM WORKING GROUPS
2

POLICY BRIEFS PRODUCED
4

GLOBAL POLICY PROCESSES ADDRESSED
WSIS+20, GDC, NETMUNDIAL+10

DAYS OF PRACTICUM
3

LANGUAGES
ENGLISH AND FRENCH

◇ Youth IGF

The 2025 West Africa Youth Internet Governance Forum (WAYIGF) took place on 21 May in Abuja, Nigeria, as a full-day event dedicated to youth engagement in digital policy development. Organized as part of WAIGF 2025, the Youth IGF brought together over 350 participants from across the region, including university students, young professionals, high school leaders, early-stage entrepreneurs, and members of youth-led organizations. The program featured 9 sessions and engaged more than 30 speakers, reaffirming the central role of young people in shaping the future of digital governance in West Africa.

The opening ceremony was marked by the presence of key Nigerian policymakers and regional stakeholders. Aending officials included Senator Shuaib Afolabi Salisu, Chairman of the Nigerian Senate Commiee on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Cybersecurity; Dr. Dimie Shively Warowei, representing the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA); Mr. Ayodele Olawande, Minister of Youth Development; and Hon. Adedeji Stanley Olajide, Chairman of the House Commiee on Digital Information, Communication Technology, and Cybersecurity. They were joined by Anja Genjo (UN IGF Secretariat), Valentine Waturuocha (Nigerian Communications Commission), Loveday Onyeanula (Nigeria Youth Internet Governance Forum), Folake Olagunju (ECOWAS Commission), and Osei Kagyah, Coordinator of WAYIGF. In their collective remarks, speakers emphasized the importance of integrating youth perspectives into national, regional, and global digital policy processes, particularly in the context of the Global Digital Compact and Africa's digital transformation agenda.

The sessions throughout the day addressed a range of critical topics. In "Building a Resilient, Inclusive and Safe Digital Future for West Africa", moderated by Mariam Jobe, panelists including Victoria Oloni, Dr. Martin Koyabe, Ephraim Oracca-Teeh, Dr. Ibiso Kingsley George, and Osondu Nwokoro examined the interplay between cybersecurity, youth leadership, and intergovernmental cooperation. Another standout panel, "Digital Public Infrastructure, Policy Harmonization, and Innovation for Development", featured speakers such as Binty Mansaray, Adamma Isamade, Kingsley Owadara, Regine Bambara, Romerik Lokossou, and Chris Odu, who explored regional infrastructure needs, inclusive governance models, and youth-driven innovation.

The track also showcased intergenerational dialogue and practical engagement. The session "Bridging the Digital Divide for Teens in West Africa" included representatives from the Ndukwe-Kalu Foundation and speakers like Amina Ramallan, Mariam Jobe, and Emmanuel Adinkra who highlighted the need for digital rights education at the secondary school level and protections for young users online. A fireside chat titled "Youth Startups Redefining West African Innovation" featured two emerging entrepreneurs, Peterson Akodi and Tinos Anogo, who shared insights on scaling tech ventures in challenging regulatory environments. They underscored the importance of policy clarity, access to funding, and mentorship in enabling youth-led innovation to flourish.
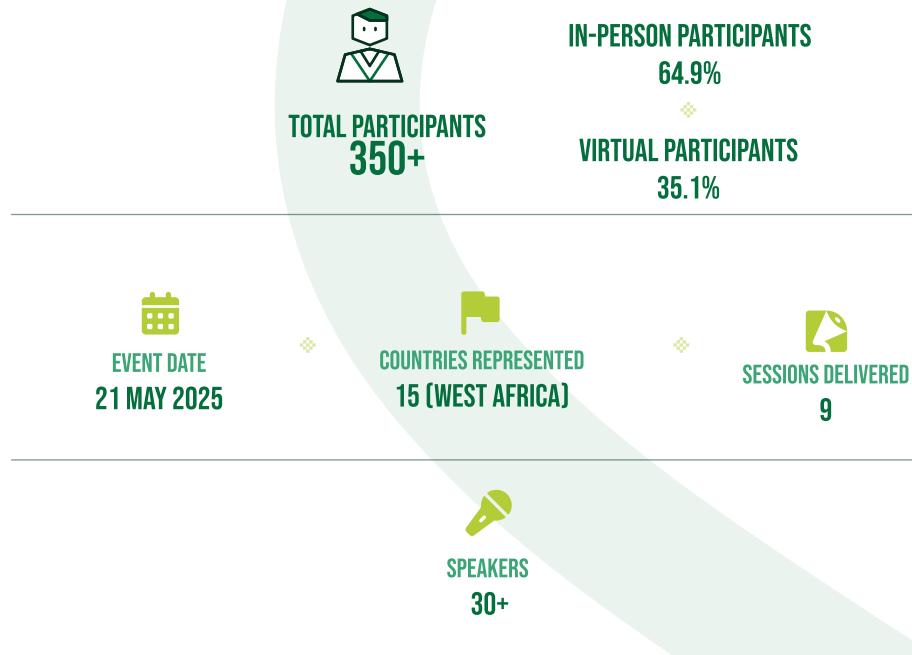
The day closed with reflections from Mary Uduma, Chair of the WAIGF, who called on governments to institutionalize youth participation beyond consultation and move toward co-creation in policymaking. Abdulrazaq Imam introduced a digital policy hackathon spotlighting the role of AI in youth empowerment, while Segun Olugbile offered a vote of thanks and reiterated the need to fund and replicate Youth IGFs at national levels across the region
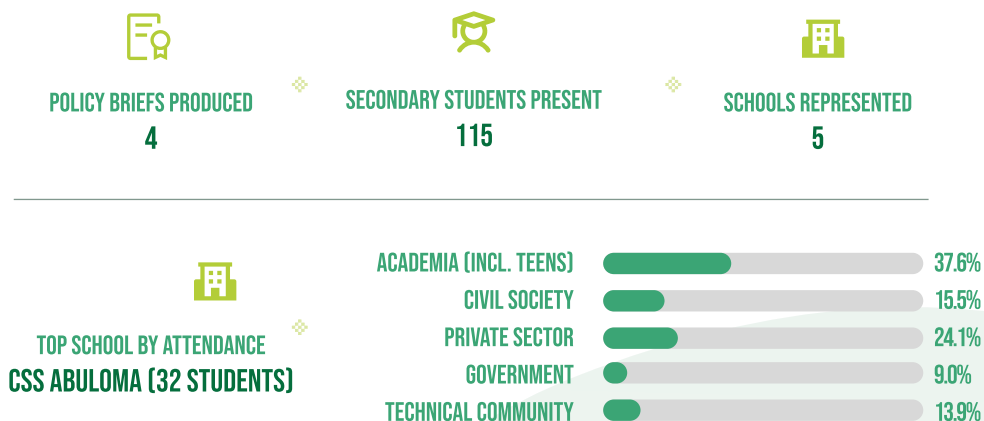
As a concrete outcome, four youth policy briefs were produced during participatory workshops held throughout the day. These briefs addressed: (1) inclusive AI literacy in schools, (2) protecting youth rights in digital public infrastructure systems, (3) policy support for youth-led startup ecosystems, and (4) ethical frameworks for innovation developed by young technologists.

These outputs are currently being reviewed for integration into ECOWAS and AU Youth engagement frameworks. WAYIGF 2025 demonstrated the depth, readiness, and creativity of West Africa's youth in tackling complex digital governance challenges. By providing them with a platform for both dialogue and policy production, the forum reinforced the necessity of embedding youth voices in the architecture of Africa's digital future—not only as participants, but as co-designers and decision-makers.

Youth IGF 2025 – Participation Overview

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
350+

IN-PERSON PARTICIPANTS
64.9%

VIRTUAL PARTICIPANTS
35.1%

EVENT DATE
21 MAY 2025

COUNTRIES REPRESENTED
15 (WEST AFRICA)

SESSIONS DELIVERED
9

SPEAKERS
30+

Youth IGF 2025 – Education & Impact

POLICY BRIEFS PRODUCED
4

SECONDARY STUDENTS PRESENT
115

SCHOOLS REPRESENTED
5

TOP SCHOOL BY ATTENDANCE
CSS ABULOMA (32 STUDENTS)

ACADEMIA (INCL. TEENS)	37.6%
CIVIL SOCIETY	15.5%
PRIVATE SECTOR	24.1%
GOVERNMENT	9.0%
TECHNICAL COMMUNITY	13.9%

WAPNIG – Parliamentarian Track

The 2025 West Africa Parliamentarian Network on Internet Governance (WAPNIG) convened from 22 to 23 May in Abuja as part of the WAIGF 2025 program. With the theme "Building a Resilient, Inclusive, and Safe Digital Future for West Africa," the track offered a dedicated space for lawmakers and policy leaders to reflect on the evolving role of parliaments in regional digital governance

This year's track brought together 25 participants, including 20 parliamentarians from nine countries: Nigeria, The Gambia, Ghana, Senegal, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Benin, and Sierra Leone. The aending legislators represented national assemblies and regional institutions, and many were active members of commiees on ICT, law, education, innovation, and national development.

Over two days, participants engaged in five structured sessions covering high-level keynotes, thematic discussions, and a roundtable dedicated to drafting a parliamentary declaration. Prominent speakers included Senator Shuaib Afolabi Salisu, Chair of the Nigerian Senate Commiee on ICT and Cybersecurity and WAPNIG Lead; Mary Uduma, WAIGF Coordinator; Chengetai Masango from the UN IGF Secretariat; and 'Gbenga Sesan, Executive Director of Paradigm Initiative. These speakers provided strategic guidance on digital sovereignty, regional cooperation, and the legislative tools needed to keep pace with digital change.

One of the central themes was data governance and digital sovereignty. Participants raised concern about the concentration of control over national data in the hands of foreign tech companies and called for data to be treated as a strategic national asset. Proposals were made to ensure that revenue derived from national data, especially when extracted by foreign platforms, should be partially returned to the state. The discussion highlighted the need for comprehensive data audits, modernized legal protections, and the enforcement of existing data protection frameworks.

Artificial intelligence and digital safety were also high on the agenda. Lawmakers expressed concern over the limited understanding of AI risks among both citizens and decision-makers. Several participants noted the growing presence of algorithmic systems in public and private sectors, raising issues of privacy, surveillance, and ethical use. The need for public awareness, responsible regulation, and regionally grounded AI strategies emerged as a clear priority.

Another major area of focus was legislative capacity. The forum emphasized the importance of equipping parliamentarians with technical knowledge and timely information on digital issues. Recommendations included establishing parliamentary commiees on digital governance where they do not exist and commiing to at least two targeted training sessions per year for MPs. These sessions would cover emerging areas such as AI, cybersecurity, and regional policy frameworks.

The importance of aligning national legislative efforts with global and regional developments was also discussed. Participants advocated for stronger engagement in processes like the WSIS+20 review and the Global Digital Compact, stressing the importance of integrating African perspectives and values into international digital instruments. They urged governments to include parliamentarians in national consultations and to work collaboratively in representing West Africa in global fora.

Finally, the track underscored the urgency of harmonizing laws across the region. Many parliamentarians pointed to the fragmented nature of existing national legislation and expressed support for deeper collaboration through ECOWAS. Model laws, shared legislative reviews, and ongoing inter-parliamentary dialogue were identified as practical next steps.

At the conclusion of the track, participants drafted a Parliamentary Declaration on Digital Governance. The declaration includes commitments to support legislative alignment, promote budgetary support for internet governance, institutionalize digital policy training, and engage actively in continental and global digital discussions. The declaration will be reviewed by national delegations and finalized through follow-up consultations.

WAPNIG 2025 reinforced the critical role that parliamentarians play in ensuring that digital transformation is inclusive, secure, and accountable. The sessions helped to build momentum toward a more coordinated regional legislative agenda and laid the foundation for stronger collaboration between policymakers, civil society, and technical experts across West Africa.

Youth IGF 2025 – Participation Overview

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
25

PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ATTENDANCE
20

COUNTRIES REPRESENTED
9

SESSIONS DELIVERED
5

FOCUS AREAS
AI, DATA, LEGISLATION, GOVERNANCE

DECLARATION DRAFTED
1 PARLIAMENTARY DECLARATION

ANNUAL TRAINING COMMITMENT
2 PER YEAR

KEY GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS ADDRESSED
WSIS+20, GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT

REGIONAL COLLABORATION FOCUS
ECOWAS MODEL LAW HARMONIZATION

WAIGF 2025 Main Forum

The Main Forum of the West Africa Internet Governance Forum (WAIGF) 2025 unfolded over two intensive days, 22 and 23 May, at the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) Conference Hall in Abuja. With 1,551 participants, 569 in person and 982 joining virtual, the forum brought together a rich cross-section of stakeholders including ministers, parliamentarians, regulators, academics, civil society leaders, private sector innovators, technical community actors, youth representatives, and global digital policy experts. With 39 sessions and more than 70 speakers, this was one of the largest and most inclusive WAIGF editions to date, confirming the forum's critical role in shaping the sub-region's digital transformation agenda.

The event commenced with a high-level Opening Ceremony that clearly set the tone for the forum. Moderated by Hajia Sani and Emmanuel Vitus, the session featured a diverse and influential panel of regional and international figures. Among the dignitaries present was His Excellency Sédiko Douka, ECOWAS Commissioner for Infrastructure, Industry and Digitalization. Commissioner Douka extended his appreciation to the Government of Nigeria for hosting the event and acknowledged the WAIGF Secretariat for its consistency in fostering inclusive internet policy dialogue. He noted that internet governance is now intrinsically linked to infrastructure security, data regulation, innovation, and economic sovereignty, stressing the urgency of regional harmonization of digital frameworks. ECOWAS, he emphasized, remains commied to advancing digital cooperation and to anchoring regional strategies in collective values and mutual accountability.

The keynote address was delivered by His Excellency Dr. Bosun Tijani, Honourable Minister of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In a comprehensive and visionary speech, Dr. Tijani situated the 2025 WAIGF at the crossroads of local development and global digital diplomacy. He described the forum as more than a policy event, calling it a "platform for shaping the architecture of the internet and for ensuring that all voices—especially African voices—are heard." He emphasized the theme of the forum, "Building a Resilient, Inclusive and Safe Digital Future for West Africa," as a strategic compass for the region, reiterating that resilience and inclusivity are not optional but existential priorities.

The Honourable Minister outlined Nigeria's recent achievements and policy directions. He cited ongoing investment in subsea cable systems, designed to reduce internet latency and strengthen regional connectivity. Through engagements with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the African Union, Nigeria is contributing to the development of a robust cross-border digital backbone. Dr. Tijani also spotlighted the work of Nigeria's newly operationalized National Data Protection Commission (NDPC), which is building mechanisms for online privacy and user trust. He highlighted the 3 Million Technical Talent (3MTT) program and other digital literacy initiatives as examples of how Nigeria is equipping youth and professionals with 21st-century skills.

The keynote struck a balance between national pride and continental duty. Dr. Tijani called for stronger West African participation in global forums like WSIS+20 and the Global Digital Compact (GDC), insisting that the region should not merely be shaped by international norms but be a co-architect of them. His address was followed by interventions from Anja Gengo of the United Nations Internet Governance Forum (UN IGF) Secretariat, who praised West Africa for its youth-led innovations and multistakeholder openness. She reminded participants that the world looks to regions like West Africa to redefine the ethics and equity of digital development.

Amrita Choudhury of the IGF Support Association (IGFSA) extended congratulations to the organizers and encouraged broader regional submission of policy reports and recommendations to inform the WSIS+20 process. Dr. Aminu Maida, Executive Vice Chairman (EVC) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), underscored the transformative power of the internet and digital infrastructure. He acknowledged NCC's ongoing work on consumer protection, AI policy engagement, and the expansion of broadband access as essential components of Nigeria's digital strategy.

The ceremony also featured Prof. Ibrahim Adepoju Adeyanju, Managing Director of Galaxy Backbone; Madam Jane Egerton-Idehen, Managing Director of NIGCOMSAT; Hon. Stanley Adedeji, Chairman of the House Committee on Digital Information and Cybersecurity; Senator Shuaib Afolabi Salisu, Chairman of the Senate Committee on ICT and Cybersecurity; Alvan Ikoku, representing the Director General of the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC); Dr. Vincent Olatunji, representing the National Commissioner of the NDPC; Mr. Kashifu Inuwa Abdullahi, Director-General of NITDA; and Dr. Dimie Shively Wariowei, Chairman of the Nigeria Internet Governance Forum (NIGF). Their contributions collectively reinforced the importance of cooperation, inclusion, and digital sovereignty. The ceremony closed with a strong emphasis on aligning WAIGF outcomes with legislative processes, and on ensuring youth, women, and rural communities remain central to all digital governance decisions.

With the tone set by the Opening Ceremony, the Main Forum transitioned into a schedule of thematic sessions. These sessions ran in three parallel rooms, drawing together institutional representatives from national ICT agencies, regulatory commissions, ministries of communication, civil society coalitions, regional organisations, academic institutions, and private sector observers. 20 sessions ranging from regulatory reform to online rights enforcement were hosted on the first day following the opening ceremony and keynote. Some discussions examined the real-time impact of misinformation and the role of national media regulators in balancing security concerns with freedom of expression. Others focused on infrastructure rollout, spectrum regulation, and market access. Agencies tasked with broadband expansion described the interplay between public investment and universal service obligations, while technical actors discussed the long-term costs of delayed network upgrades. One room was dedicated to exploring youth-led civic tech models, including community Wi-Fi deployment and locally-built platforms for civic engagement. Researchers from within the region shared baseline data on digital literacy rates and urban–rural disparities in access, prompting proposals for more agile institutional data-sharing across ECOWAS countries.

Sessions also dissected legal frameworks governing electronic transactions, personal data protection, and cybercrime, revealing significant divergence between national systems. Representatives from UEMOA institutions and law faculties proposed a legal dashboard mapping out contradictory clauses and regulatory bolenecks. The debate touched on the difficulty of enforcing digital consumer rights and the growing tension between transnational data flows and state sovereignty. These insights aligned with broader calls for procedural convergence in procurement, dispute resolution, and public tenders involving digital infrastructure.

On 23 May, 19 additional sessions built on the previous day's momentum, including technical workshops on Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs), multilingual resource development, and cybersecurity risk mapping. One of the most well-aended technical panels addressed Universal Acceptance, where representatives from domain name authorities, language commissions, and academia pointed out that most African languages still lack institutional support in web interfaces, email systems, and browser compatibility. They noted that the current pipeline for accepting domain names in indigenous scripts is undermined by procurement criteria that exclude local developers. As a result, several proposals emerged, including the creation of a regionally administered acceptance testing lab to validate African scripts in real-world conditions and to prepare for the next ICANN gTLD application round.

In sessions devoted to media and freedom of information, journalists and digital rights groups documented case studies of platform takedowns, social media throling, and spyware use targeting activists. These discussions highlighted the vulnerability of journalists and civil society actors in an environment where legal remedies are weak or inaccessible. Civil society organisations based in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and The Gambia presented advocacy strategies combining litigation, community organising, and international reporting mechanisms. They also proposed mechanisms to link WAIGF resolutions more directly with press unions and parliamentary ICT commiees.

The question of resilience in connectivity and infrastructure was raised repeatedly. In sessions that explored the physical foundations of the internet, participants outlined a shared concern about the absence of regionally distributed hosting infrastructure, data centres, and redundancy protocols. Environmental groups presented data on power consumption across major ISPs and data centres in the region, linking it with the need for targeted policies on electronic waste, energy efficiency, and procurement guidelines for data-heavy services.

In addition to the diverse sessions held over the two days, the WAIGF 2025 Main Forum was anchored by 4 central plenary discussions, beginning with a high-level panel on 22 May. This opening panel, titled "Building a Resilient, Inclusive, and Safe Digital Future for West Africa," brought together representatives from sub regional and national institutions to articulate long-term priorities for governance across the digital sphere. Discussions focused on the need for broadband equity, digital trust, and public accountability in technology adoption. Contributions from data protection commissions, ICT regulators, and regional institutions centered on the risks of exclusion, surveillance, and centralization of decision-making. The panel also addressed gaps in infrastructure funding and the need to rethink procurement models, pointing to public investment shortfalls, limited local vendor engagement, and duplications in cross-border digital projects. Participants reaffirmed the importance of upholding human rights and public interest in all digital policy discussions and proposed stronger involvement of West African institutions in shaping international regulatory developments.

The first thematic plenary explored the interrelation between cybersecurity, data protection, and online safety, all under the broader lens of resilience. Agencies responsible for security, communications, and consumer protection examined the rise in state-level and transnational cyberthreats and how they intersect with weak public awareness and fragmented enforcement regimes. Legal representatives discussed recent national legislation and the varying definitions of personal data and consent across countries. Privacy experts pointed out how cybercrime laws, when poorly wrien or enforced, can unintentionally suppress civil liberties. The exchange also shed light on the urgent need to protect minors online, regulate biometric data collection, and introduce redress mechanisms for victims of online fraud. Civil society groups working in rural and peri-urban areas contributed examples of digital literacy campaigns and peer training networks, while academic institutions presented risk mapping tools being piloted in selected countries to assess threat exposure and response gaps.

A second plenary convened key public and intergovernmental institutions to reflect on Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), regional policy alignment, and cooperation mechanisms. In this conversation, foundational elements like national ID systems, interoperability standards, and digital payment rails were examined not just as technical infrastructure but as structuring forces in service access, mobility, and rights recognition. Ministries of finance, regional digital commissions, and public procurement authorities debated whether current DPI models sufficiently respond to the needs of communities most affected by digital exclusion. Concerns were raised over single-vendor dependency, the lack of regional baselines for DPI deployment, and the uneven maturity of public procurement policies in technology projects. Participants shared practical steps being taken in various countries to introduce cross-border digital services, digital trade registries, and aligned DPI audits. These discussions reinforced the notion that public infrastructure must remain under public accountability, with transparency in its design, usage, and ownership.

The final plenary of the forum turned to the overlapping themes of Artificial Intelligence, data governance, and innovation in public service delivery. Technical coordinators, data officers, and research networks described how AI systems are being tested and introduced in areas such as social welfare, health, and policing often without sufficient consultation or safeguards. A recurring issue raised was the absence of African languages, cultural references, and ethical benchmarks in the datasets used to train such systems. Public institutions shared reflections on the tension between national AI roadmaps and regional or continental strategies, noting uneven investment capacity and legal preparation. Language commissions and AI research labs proposed working models for integrating local scripts into machine learning pipelines. Panelists underlined that if left unchecked, AI deployment could replicate and exacerbate existing paerns of exclusion, discrimination, and opacity in decision-making. A call was made for West Africa to coordinate not only its technical research but also its policy vision for AI in a way that centres human rights, local knowledge, and long-term public interest.

Note that throughout both days, youth participation remained visible not only in sessions explicitly targeting young audiences but in mainstream discussions on regulation, entrepreneurship, and future technologies. One session showcased the experience of youth networks incubating digital watchdog initiatives to monitor election transparency and online hate speech, using simple tools like SMS alerts and collaborative spreadsheets. In other workshops, students and early-career professionals shared assessments of national AI policies and brainstormed community-led digital literacy interventions.

Importantly, the forum offered continuity across years by spotlighting progress made since WAIGF 2024 and seing a forward-looking agenda. This was most evident in sessions that tracked implementation of previous WAIGF recommendations, including legal harmonization efforts, the setup of national Internet Governance Forums (IGFs), and institutional memory tools such as repositories of legislation and open session recordings. In these exchanges, regional organisations shared methods for benchmarking state performance and tracing uptake of commitments made at WAIGF events.

FORUM DURATION	**NUMBER OF SESSIONS**	**NUMBER OF PLENARIES**
2 DAYS	39 SESSIONS	4 PLENARIES (INCL. 1 HIGH-LEVEL)

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS (HYBRID)	**COUNTRIES REPRESENTED**
1,551 (982 ONLINE, 569 ONSITE)	NIGERIA, GHANA, BENIN, CÔTE D'IVOIRE, SENEGAL, SIERRA LEONE, LIBERIA, TOGO, THE GAMBIA, GUINEA, NIGER, BURKINA FASO, MALI, GUINEA-BISSAU, CAPE VERDE

INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION	**NUMBER OF SPEAKERS**
SWIERLAND, FRANCE, RUSSIA, MALTA, CHINA, SOUTH AFRICA, KENYA, RWANDA, UGANDA	OVER 110 SPEAKERS

THEMATIC FOCUS AREAS
AI GOVERNANCE, DPI, CYBERSECURITY, DATA, INCLUSION, LEGAL HARMONIZATION, DIGITAL RIGHTS, ENVIRONMENT, ACCESS

KEY PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS
ECOWAS, NITDA, NCC, NDPC, ISOC, IGFSA, UN IGF, NIRA, PARADIGM INITIATIVE, GALAXY BACKBONE, IGF SUPPORT ASSOCIATION,

PARALLEL SESSION HALLS
3

Feedbacks from the Forum

Session feedback collected during WAIGF 2025 offered a window into participant experience, topic relevance, and perceived depth of discussion across the programme. More than 60 individual forms were submied across the five-day event, with the majority centered on sessions held during the Main Forum on 22 and 23 May. Participants represented institutions including national regulatory bodies, universities, and civil society organizations, and their feedback ranged from structured ratings to open-ended remarks.

Overall, sessions addressing Artificial Intelligence, Digital Public Infrastructure, and gender-sensitive ICT policies received high ratings. Respondents often commended the clarity of presentations and the depth of local examples shared. The session on "DPI, Data Governance, and Gender-Sensitive ICT Policy," held on 23 May, was particularly well received. Representatives from academia, gender advocacy networks, and national authorities underscored the lack of gender disaggregated data in current policy design and the invisibility of women in technical governance roles. While applauding the session for raising these issues, several participants noted the need for follow-up workshops focused specifically on implementation gaps at the national level.

Another session, focused on Universal Acceptance and language inclusion in domain name systems, drew feedback from linguistic experts and ICT regulators. Respondents appreciated the aempt to connect technical standards with local language rights, though a few comments asked for more granular examples and broader participation from francophone countries. Youth-led sessions scored well on interactivity, particularly where speakers from outside capital cities were given the floor.

Some participants raised concerns about overlapping content and panel congestion in a few parallel sessions. Others recommended language interpretation services for all sessions, not just plenaries, especially in forums aiming to represent the entire West African region. A recurring suggestion was the publication of session summaries within 48 hours to guide ongoing conversations. Taken together, the feedback highlights not only a high degree of engagement but also a desire for longer-term continuity and more inclusive technical planning in future editions.

Key Outcomes and Recommendations

Throughout the five-day forum, discussions often circled back to several concrete concerns shared by institutions, professionals, and communities across West Africa. One consistent thread was the mismatch between digital laws in the region. Legislators, research centres, and regulatory bodies pointed out how this lack of coordination has led to inconsistent rules on personal data, online commerce, and cybersecurity. Participants called for a process that brings countries together to compare their laws, publish annotated collections of legal texts, and encourage routine exchange between legal drafters. These proposals were not abstract but linked to very real problems—such as cross-border fraud, data ownership disputes, and the administrative burden of managing digital services across jurisdictions with different legal standards.

Another theme centred on people's access to digital services. Representatives from rural areas, language institutes, and public education projects described the obstacles that prevent many West Africans from using the internet safely and meaningfully. Affordability was one part of the problem, but other issues such as missing language support, unclear information policies, and weak infrastructure came up repeatedly. Sessions explored what it would take to expand internet access without deepening existing divides. Suggestions included public databases in local languages, shared tools for script diversity online, and country-wide programmes to train women, rural youth, and persons with disabilities on digital practices and their rights.

There was also considerable discussion around public infrastructure and who controls it. Multiple delegates raised concerns about the dependence on private vendors for cloud hosting, payment systems, and identity verification tools. These concerns were framed not just in technical terms, but in relation to public oversight, democratic control, and long-term self-determination. Some institutions presented examples of home-grown infrastructure projects and proposed sharing procurement templates and technical documentation across countries. There were calls to increase scrutiny around contracts signed with foreign digital suppliers and to make these processes more open to public review.

Artificial intelligence drew particular aention. Participants from academic institutions, government bodies, and civil society voiced concerns over the absence of local voices in the way machine learning systems are built and deployed. Several sessions underlined how these systems often carry built-in biases—ignoring local names, social realities, and languages. Delegates from public universities, national data offices, and research councils proposed creating annotated language corpora and linking national research grants to public service needs. Others recommended that no AI system be introduced into public administration unless it has been tested by local groups, with wrien documentation and human supervision requirements.

A final set of proposals revolved around how the WAIGF process itself could become more responsive. Youth participants, women's networks, and digital rights organisations asked for ways to stay connected after the event ends. Proposals included quarterly digital roundtables, the launch of a West Africa policy bulletin, and a tracking website to monitor which ideas from the forum end up shaping public decisions. Other contributors pushed for direct reporting lines between WAIGF and parliamentary offices, to make sure ideas raised at the forum are not forgoen once everyone returns home.

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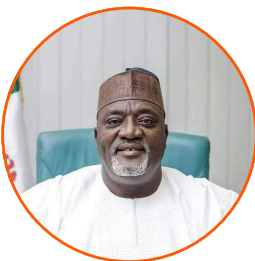**DiploFoundation**
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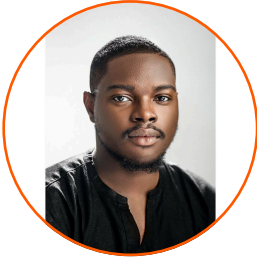
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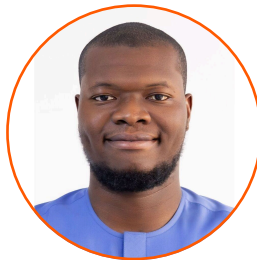
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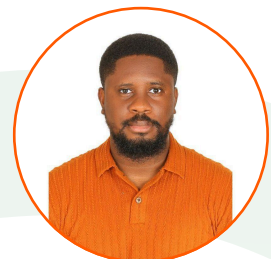
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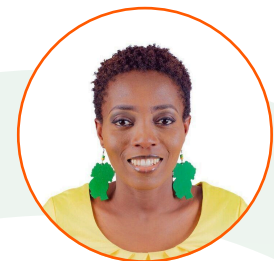
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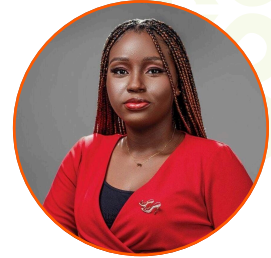**Commission (NIMC)**
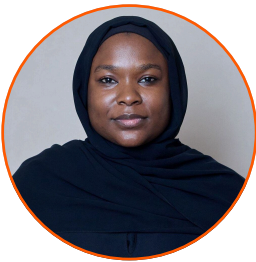Director-General (DG)

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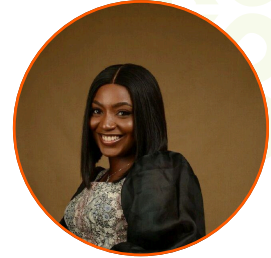**Paradigm Initiative**
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