

COMMUNIQUE

West African Parliamentary Network on Internet Governance (WAPNIG)

Parliamentary Track — West Africa Internet Governance Forum 2026

Freetown, Sierra Leone | 14–15 May 2026

Preamble

We, the Parliamentarians of West Africa gathered under the auspices of the West Africa Parliamentary Network on Internet Governance (WAPNIG), convening in Freetown, Sierra Leone on 14–15 May 2026 for the Parliamentary Track of the West Africa Internet Governance Forum (WAIGF) 2026,

Acknowledging the convening role of WAPNIG and the West Africa IGF Secretariat, and the opening contributions of Mary Uduma, Coordinator of the WAIGF; Chengetai Masango, Head of the UN Internet Governance Forum; Hon. Fallah Tengbeh, Deputy Chairman of the Committee on Communication, Technology and Innovation, Parliament of Sierra Leone; Hon. Lydia Lamisi Akanvariba, Minister of State for Public Sector Reforms, Ghana; and Gilbert Bosco N'habay, Deputy Clerk of the House of Parliament, Sierra Leone;

This 3rd annual meeting emphasized the transition from observation to **Digital Sovereignty in Action**.

Recognising the critical importance of sound legislative frameworks in governing the digital transformation of West Africa and the African continent at large;

1. Digital Sovereignty and the Integrated Digital Market

On digital sovereignty, West African Parliamentarians affirmed that:

- Digital sovereignty is not merely a technical matter but a legislative imperative. States must define by law how national data is stored, processed, and protected, and must resist ceding these decisions to foreign commercial actors by default.
- Digital services and platforms operating in the region without fiscal contribution represent an economic degradation of national revenue. The non-taxation of digital services is an economic liability that legislators must urgently address.
- The ECOWAS Parliament is a critical forum for advancing regional digital cooperation, and member parliaments should leverage it proactively to harmonise legislative approaches across the sub-region.

2. AI Literacy and Legislative Readiness

An AI Sprinter Workshop, introduced parliamentarians to the AI Framework and emphasised the strategic role of artificial intelligence and cloud computing in strengthening parliamentary efficiency and public governance. Participants agreed that:

- AI training is a prerequisite for democratic oversight of technological governance. Parliamentarians who cannot understand, interrogate, or amend digital legislation are unable to exercise effective democratic control over the technologies shaping their societies.
- Africa must invest in its own data infrastructure, including regional data centres, to reduce structural dependence on Western platforms and exercise meaningful control over its data assets.
- Accountability frameworks must be developed for AI systems deployed in public decision-making, to ensure transparency, fairness, and redress.

3. Platform Accountability, Fiscal Justice, and Consumer Protection

Parliamentarians affirmed that:

- Fiscal Justice — ensuring that digital platforms contribute equitably to the local economies in which they operate — is a legitimate and pressing legislative objective. Parliaments must assert this through taxation frameworks, licensing conditions, and transparency requirements.
- Legislators must strike a careful balance: asserting accountability and fiscal contribution without creating regulatory environments that deter the investment and innovation the region needs.
- Consumer protection legislation must keep pace with the digital economy, covering data rights, algorithmic accountability, and redress mechanisms for platform-related harms.

4. AI Governance and Regulation

The extended parliamentary workshop on AI Governance equipped parliamentarians with practical knowledge and tools for legislative engagement on AI. Key conclusions included:

- West Africa faces structural challenges in digital governance, including infrastructure deficits, high dependence on foreign platforms, and the absence of harmonised regulatory frameworks. These challenges are addressable through coordinated parliamentary action.
- AI governance legislation must be future-proofed: built on principles that can adapt to rapidly evolving technology rather than rigid technical specifications that quickly become obsolete.

5. Data Economy and the Role of Parliaments

The Implementation Lab explored how parliamentarians can shape data governance frameworks that protect citizens while unlocking economic potential. The session affirmed that:

- Data governance is not a purely executive function — parliaments must take ownership of the legislative infrastructure for data protection, data localisation, and cross-border data flows.
- A harmonised ECOWAS-level standard for data governance would provide a common floor for member states, enabling the region to participate on more equitable terms in the global digital economy.



- Senegal's data protection framework and its functioning data protection authority were highlighted as a regional model and a benchmark from which other member states should draw lessons and best practices.

6. Calls to Action

On the basis of the foregoing discussions, WAPNIG parliamentarians call upon member parliaments, ECOWAS institutions, and partner organisations to take the following actions:

For Member Parliaments

- Enact or strengthen national data protection legislation, with particular attention to data localisation, data subject rights, and the establishment of empowered data protection authorities.
- Integrate AI and digital technology literacy into parliamentary capacity-building programmes, to equip legislators to effectively scrutinise, amend, and oversee digital legislation.
- Introduce fiscal legislation to ensure that digital platforms and services operating within national jurisdictions contribute fairly to the national tax base.
- Ratify and domesticate the Malabo Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection as a matter of priority.

For ECOWAS and Regional Bodies

- Develop and advance a harmonised ECOWAS digital governance framework, covering data protection, platform accountability, cybersecurity, and AI regulation, to guide convergent national legislation across the sub-region.
- Utilise the ECOWAS Parliament as a vehicle for regional digital policy coordination and legislative harmonisation.
- Invest in the development of regional data infrastructure, including data centres, to reduce dependence on foreign cloud providers and assert regional data sovereignty.

For WAPNIG and the IGF Community

- Document and disseminate legislative models and best practices from across the region, including existing initiatives from Senegal, Nigeria, and other member states, to serve as replicable frameworks.
- Pursue structured multi-stakeholder engagement between parliaments, civil society organisations, technical bodies such as AFRINIC, and the private sector to ensure inclusive and legitimate digital governance policymaking.
- Carry forward the priorities identified at this Forum into the deliberations of the global IGF and other relevant international fora.

Closing

The Parliamentarians of the WAPNIG Parliamentary Track express their sincere gratitude to the Government and people of Sierra Leone for hosting the West Africa IGF 2026 in Freetown, and



commend the WAPNIG Secretariat, the WAIGF Secretariat, Smart Africa, The German Corporation, AFRINIC, and all expert contributors for the quality of the two-day engagement.

We reaffirm our collective commitment to advancing an open, secure, inclusive, and rights-respecting digital future for West Africa — one grounded in the rule of law, democratic oversight, and the equitable distribution of the benefits of the digital economy.

Adopted by consensus in Freetown, Sierra Leone, on 15 May 2026.

Senator Shuaib Afolabi Salisu

Chairman, WAPNIG

Mariam Jobe & Benjamin Ikibah

WAPNIG Secretariat