

## **Regional Input of the West Africa Internet Governance Forum (WAIGF) to the WSIS+20 Zero Draft**

### **Preamble**

The West Africa Internet Governance Forum (WAIGF), convening representatives from the Western African region States, submits this contribution to the WSIS+20 Zero Draft. Our submission reflects the outcomes of the seventeenth edition of our Forum, which incorporates lessons learned and builds upon the priorities outlined in the Zero Draft of the WSIS+20 outcome document.

### **I. Bridging Digital Divides**

1. We note with concern the persistence of digital divides within and between countries of the West African sub-region, particularly between urban and rural areas, and between men and women.
2. We recommend that universal service and access funds be restructured to support community networks and cross-border fibre connectivity, ensuring affordable and meaningful access for all.
3. We urge regional cooperation to expand cross-border fibre connectivity and strengthen local and regional Internet exchange points (IXPs) to reduce latency and costs.
4. We reaffirm the need to promote local language content development as a driver of meaningful access and cultural diversity.

### **II. Digital Public Infrastructure and Policy Harmonization**

1. We recognise the importance of digital public infrastructure (DPI) as a foundation for inclusive digital transformation.

2. We urge that DPI deployment fully respect data sovereignty and avoid deepening dependence on a limited number of global platforms.

### **III. Artificial Intelligence and Data Governance**

1. We recognise the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) while remaining mindful of its associated risks, including those related to human rights, employment, and equality.
2. We call on West African States to adopt inclusive national AI strategies tailored to local realities, with regional standards for ethical AI and responsible data governance.
3. We recommend investment in culturally relevant AI tools and datasets, particularly in local languages and priority sectors such as agriculture, health, and education.

### **IV. Digital Sustainability**

1. We remain concerned about the environmental impact of ICT expansion, including e-waste, energy consumption, and reliance on critical minerals.
2. We support the development of the Digital Sustainability Pact to promote renewable energy use, responsible e-waste management, and climate-resilient digital innovation.
3. We call for strengthened research collaboration to monitor and address the environmental impact of digitalisation.

### **V. Youth, Education, and Innovation**

1. We reaffirm that young people are key partners in digital transformation.
2. We recommend the integration of digital literacy into formal education systems at all levels and the expansion of innovation hubs, mentorship programmes, and

funding schemes for youth-led initiatives.

## **VI. Inclusion and Rights-Based Access**

1. We reaffirm that digital transformation must be human-centric, equitable and rights-based.
2. We urge Member States to refrain from Internet shutdowns and arbitrary surveillance, which undermine human rights and economic activity.
3. We call for enhanced protection of journalists, civic actors, women, and children online, in line with international human rights law.
4. We further emphasize the critical need for Member States to adopt a multi-stakeholder model in all digital policy-making processes, ensuring that digital transformation upholds human fundamentals.
5. We support Universal Acceptance and multilingualism, critical for preserving the linguistic and cultural diversity of the people and communities.

## **VII. Cybersecurity and Digital Trust**

1. We note the urgent need for a regional cybersecurity framework to strengthen cooperation and rapid response.
2. We reaffirm our commitment to a multi-stakeholder internet governance model that ensures an open, free, global, interoperable, reliable, secure, and stable internet. Regional cybersecurity frameworks and digital trust initiatives in West Africa must be developed in alignment with these core principles, contributing to a secure and resilient global digital environment.
3. We recommend capacity-building for national CERTs/CSIRTs and the establishment of mechanisms for regional coordination in incident response.
4. We further recommend awareness campaigns and training to strengthen digital trust at the community level.

## **VIII. Parliamentary Engagement and Legal Frameworks**

24. We recognise the essential role of legislatures in ensuring inclusive, secure, and sustainable digital governance.
25. We support the strengthening of the West Africa Parliamentary Network on Internet Governance (WAPNIG) as a regional platform for legislative cooperation.
26. We recommend the development of harmonised regional digital laws in areas such as data protection, cybersecurity, and AI ethics.

## **IX. Multistakeholderism and Global Engagement**

1. We reaffirm support for the institutionalisation of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as a permanent UN body.
2. We recommend the establishment of a strong Secretariat to enhance global and regional coordination and strengthen the region's representation in global fora, including WSIS+20 and the Global Digital Compact.
3. We recommend that the WSIS+20 review and the Global Digital Compact (GDC) processes be integrated through a joint implementation roadmap, combined review mechanisms, and harmonized reporting frameworks, to ensure greater coherence and efficiency in global digital governance.
4. We support the integration and harmonisation of the WSOS actionlines with the GDC to avoid duplication and thus enhance their implementation in the West African states.
5. We call on the United Nations and partners to provide dedicated support for African participation, including youth, women, SMEs, and civil society, in global digital governance processes. In this wise, the proposal for a fellowship programme to support increased participation of stakeholders from developing countries in the WSIS process is welcome.
6. We advocate for dedicated support and active participation of West African stakeholders in proposed UN AI research programs and capacity-building fellowships, ensuring that these initiatives address the unique needs and priorities of our region. Furthermore, we call for the development of ethical AI guidelines that are culturally sensitive and promote inclusive AI development.

## **Follow-up & Review**

1. We support the view that there should be WSIS and Global Digital Compact (GDC) annual review at the country level. This would be necessary for effective follow-up and monitoring of progress of the implementation of the WSIS Action lines and targets and the GDC towards the 2030 Goals.
2. We recognise the regular regional follow-up work of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. To complement the work of UNECA, especially since the Global Digital Compact (GDC) is being appended to this workload, we recommend that the WSIS+20 Review provide for annual WSIS and GDC reviews in developing countries using existing Internet Governance mechanisms.

## **Conclusion**

1. The WAIGF emphasises that the WSIS+20 review must ensure that Africa, and West Africa in particular, is not left behind but rather positioned as an active shaper of the global digital future.
2. We stand ready to work with the United Nations, ECOWAS, the African Union, and other partners to operationalise the commitments of the WSIS+20 Zero Draft and the Global Digital Compact in our region.