

THE AFRICAN UNION OPEN FORUM 2021

Background

The African Internet Governance Forum (AfIGF) was formally launched by the African Union and the UN Economic Commission for Africa on 30 September 2011 during the 6th Internet Governance Forum, held in Nairobi, Kenya. From that date, AfIGF has been organized successfully every year in many different African countries and sub-regions. Experience gained during the various AfIGF meetings, demonstrated that in order to translate the recommendations of AfIGF into concrete actions by the African Member States and other regional stakeholders, it was necessary that diplomatic leverage be applied to the African Union political leadership to further advance the African stakeholders' ambitions and aspirations. This prompted the 4th ordinary session of the African Union Conference of Ministers in charge of Communication and Information Technologies (CITMC-4) held in Sudan in September 2012 to request Member States "to support the establishment of national IGF to create dialogue between all stakeholders on ICT for development issues and facilitate the countries' participation in the regional and African IGF processes as well as in the global IGF". The Khartoum declaration led to the stepping up of IGFs at all levels on the continent while at the same time underlining the geopolitical and strategic importance of the process, which prompted preparation by all stakeholders of the Declaration on Internet Governance and the African Digital Economy, adopted by the African Union Head of States in their January 2018 Summit. This declaration is seen as a means to strengthen the Internet Governance processes in Africa and involvement of the African Union in IG processes globally.

Africa 2020 IGF

Africa plans to convene the 10th African Internet Governance forum from 22 – 24 November 2021, tentatively. This will precede the Global IGF to be held on 6th to 10th December 2021, in Katowice, Poland as a hybrid.

The African Union organized a virtual AfIGF in 2020. Due to COVID-19 challenges, the 2020 virtual AfIGF was held after the Global IGF 2020. Africa IGF 2020 was held between November 25th to 27th, the African Youth IGF was held on November 24th while the AfriSIG was held on November 23rd. The representation in all the three events was diverse and the discussions were engaging and inclusive. The following positive elements were widely acknowledged by participants just like in the previous years:

- high profile opening and closing ceremony;
- large number of participants;
- hosting of the 2nd African Youth Forum (virtually)
- hosting of the AfriSIG organized as a get together of all AfriSIG participants from inception.

African Union Open Forum 2021

In view of the success of the virtual 2020 Open Forum, the African Union plans to organize the 2021 AU Open Forum.

The AU Open Forum aims at discussing digital inclusion especially in relation to Capacity Building; Digital Transformation; Data Policy, Cybersecurity and Digital Cooperation. The Forum will also discuss the Internet Governance Capacity Building activities of the AU-EU Project entitled Policy and Regulatory

Initiative for Digital Africa (PRIDA), which focuses on digital inclusion. The highlights from the forum held in 2020 are:

On PRIDA, the following elements were noted:

- The need to involve MPs was stressed. Hence the focused workshop targeting MPs and diplomats is being proposed as a workshop during the IGF 2021.
- PRIDA emphasized on its implementation of the IG strategy aimed at streamlining the IG processes at the national, regional and continental level. This process was however affected by COVID-19 and continued in 2021
- During the year, PRIDA supported 9 countries to establish and hold their first schools of IG namely (Botswana, Eswatini, Madagascar, Morocco, Liberia, Cape Verde, Egypt, Mauritania and Comoros) and supported 5 countries to hold their IGF namely (Botswana, Eswatini, Madagascar, Liberia and Cape Verde)
- PRIDA reported that balanced gender inclusion was a key consideration in the recruitment of the participants to the Schools of IG

On policy recommendations and the way forward:

- The recommendations from the previous year were reflected on and taken into consideration as reflected in the previous paragraphs.
- Interpretation services were provided in English and French by experts hired by session organizers which ensured that diversity and language dimensions were adhered to in line with the IGF principles, hence making better use of time allocated and available intellectual resources.

The 2021 Forum will be linked to the SDGs, especially Goals 5, 8, 9, 10 and 17. Like in 2020, the African Union Open Forum is expected to be attended by a broad stakeholders' representation across government, private sector, academia, technical communities, civil society, ministers, parliamentarians, media, regional and international organizations.

The session Moderator will be Adil Sulieman Suliemana@africa-union.org. The Panelists will be derived from: The African Union Commission (Moses Bayingana BayinganaM@africa-union.org) Chair of AfIGF-MAG (Mary Uduma mnuduma@yahoo.com), Chair of the Host of 2021 Continental IGF, PRIDA Senior IG Expert (Margaret Nyambura Ndung'u Nyamburamn@gfa-group.de) UN Economic Commission for Africa (Mactar Seck, seck8@un.org) and Internet Society (Dawit Bekele bekele@isoc.org). The rapporteur will be (Joshua Joshua joshuajosh59@gmail.com), Nigeria and (Aicha Chebbi Jeridi a.j.chebbi@gmail.com) of Tunisia while (Salyou Fanny salyoufanny@gmail.com) from Cote d'Ivoire will be the remote moderator. At the end of the Forum it is expected that the voices of stakeholders on IG issues will be heard and that the way forward to the African IGF 2022 and the global IGF 2022 planned to be held in Ethiopia will be drawn.