13ᵗʰ Africa Internet Governance Forum (AfIGF)

20-22 November 2024 | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Communiqué

The 13th Africa Internet Governance Forum (AfIGF) convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, bringing together 430 in-person delegates and 300 virtual participants from governments, civil society, academia, the private sector, and the technical community. Additionally, the African School of Internet Governance (AfriSIG), organized as pre-event to the forum, held 60 participants, equipping them with the skills to engage in internet governance discussions.

Under the theme *"Building Our Multi-Stakeholder Digital Future for Africa,"* the forum facilitated inclusive discussions on Africa's digital transformation, addressing topics such as data governance, cybersecurity, digital rights, emerging technologies, and digital inclusion. Keynote speakers, including Dr. Belete Molla (Minister of Innovation and Technology, Ethiopia), Mr. Claver Gatete (Executive Secretary, ECA), and Ms. Onica Nonhlanhla Makwakwa (Executive Director, GDIP), emphasized Africa's urgent need for harmonized policies to bridge the digital divide, promote cross-border data governance, and create an inclusive digital economy.

The AfIGF featured high-level discussions on strategic digital inclusion and innovation initiatives, along with a parliamentary track that enabled African legislators to explore policy and regulatory frameworks aimed at enhancing digital accessibility and security. Key recommendations included sharing knowledge and information on data governance legislations to enable member states to learn from their peers' experiences.

The forum also called for strengthening engagements within the network of African parliamentarians for internet governance, promoting "e-science" to leverage science and technology research across Africa, and creating platforms for African scientists to share knowledge. Additionally, the need for an effective e-governance regulatory framework and compliance was emphasized to better leverage the private sector, ensuring resources are used more efficiently for development.

The 13th AfIGF also hosted the Africa Youth IGF, providing a platform for young internet governance leaders to collectively discuss their local initiatives and projects. Workshops during the forum focused on aligning national and regional efforts with broader continental and global Internet governance strategies, fostering collaboration and strengthening Africa's digital landscape.

Key Recommendations and Thematic Outcomes

1. Data Governance and Digital Trade

- Develop a comprehensive cross-border data policy framework aligned with the Malabo Convention.
- Harmonize data governance regulations across African countries to facilitate trade under the AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol.
- Promote public-private partnerships (PPPs) to enhance innovation and skill development in digital trade.
- Strengthen data protection and cybersecurity laws to safeguard citizens' digital rights.
- Ensure government procurement policies align with digital trade growth objectives.

2. Digital Inclusion and Access

- Strengthen Universal Service Funds (USFs) through transparency, autonomy, and better fund allocation.
- Expand broadband access to underserved and rural areas through PPPs and innovative financing models.
- Prioritize affordability and accessibility for marginalized groups, particularly women and persons with disabilities.

- Advocate for regulatory frameworks that support small telecom operators and community networks.

3. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Emerging Technologies

- Increase funding opportunities for women-led AI startups.
- Ensure gender mainstreaming in AI development and dataset design.
- Support policies that promote equitable participation in AI research and innovation.
- Establish mentorship programs connecting experienced women in tech with young girls interested in AI careers.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of actions taken to enhance women's participation in AI.

4. Feminist-Informed Digital Rights and Gender Equity

- Integrate the Global Digital Compact (GDC) recommendations into national digital rights frameworks.
- Leverage Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanisms to track government progress on digital rights, particularly for women and marginalized groups.
- Build capacity among civil society organizations (CSOs) to advocate for intersectional feminist approaches to digital rights.
- Localize and contextualize digital rights frameworks to align with African languages and cultural contexts.

5. Community Networks and Infrastructure Development

- Advocate for affordable licensing frameworks for small telecom operators and community networks.
- Implement innovative financing solutions, including government subsidies and telecom USFs, to support community-led connectivity initiatives.
- Partner with organizations such as the Internet Society and APC to provide technical training and policy advocacy for community networks.

6. Creative Communications for Digital Rights Advocacy

- Encourage organizations to use audiovisual storytelling to raise awareness about digital rights.
- Ensure high-quality production and accessible content, including subtitles and sign language interpretations.
- Establish diverse feedback loops to enhance engagement and effectiveness of digital campaigns.

Recommendations for Next Steps

- Organize follow-up workshops to track progress on AI and gender inclusion in Africa.
- Create platforms for knowledge-sharing on successful digital trade policies and best practices.
- Develop a dedicated task force to align AI strategies across Smart Africa, AUDA-NEPAD, and other regional frameworks.
- Strengthen regional collaboration for the operationalization of digital and cybersecurity laws.
- Advocate for a bottom-up approach in developing data governance policies.

The 13th AfIGF underscored the importance of harmonized policies and multi-stakeholder engagement in Africa's digital transformation. With key recommendations centered around digital trade, data governance, inclusion, and rights-based approaches, stakeholders are urged to take proactive steps in implementing the proposed frameworks. The forum concluded with the announcement that the 14th AfIGF will be held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 2025.

For further details and the full communiqué, visit: https://igf.africa.