THE AFRICAN UNION OPEN FORUM 2020

October 2020

I. 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 conferences, demonstrated that in order to translate the recommendations of AfIGF into concrete actions by 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.

The African Union organized a Forum in 2019.

II. African Union Open Forum 2019

The African IGF secretariat organized the African Union Open Forum on Tuesday 26 November 2019 in "Convention Hall I - D", Estrel Congress Center, Berlin, Germany.

It was attended by over 200 participants, including three African ministers and over twenty African MPs.

It aimed at discussing accomplishments of the African IGF 2019 in relation to digital inclusion as well as the Policy and Regulatory Initiative for Digital Africa (PRIDA), an AU-EU Project which largely deals with capacity building for digital inclusion at the national, sub-regional and regional levels on the continent. PRIDA's Internet Governance Implementation Strategy is based on pillars which streamlines the IGF process across the continent and build Internet Governance Capacity.

On the African IGF, the following positive elements were widely acknowledged by participants:

- high profile opening and closing ceremony;
- large number of participants;
- hosting of the first African Youth Forum and active engagement of youth (62%) which outnumbered by far the other age groups;
- hosting of a caucus of elders;
- delivery of an African IGF Award

Participants recommended that this trend in supporting youth be escalated in the next African IGFs and that the forums continue to be opened and closed by very high level officials.

On PRIDA, the following elements were noted:

- Several MPs underlined the need for involvement of legislators in the IG process and presented achievements and plans ahead in their respective countries and in ECOWAS.
- It was agreed that the Harmonization of national, regional and continental IGFs would be the way forward in streamlining the IG processes while the various capacity building tools which were developed and are being translated to French and put online would be useful for policymakers and parliamentarians.
- The role of PRIDA in empowering women in the IG space was also raised.

- Participants requested support of PRIDA to other IG related activities, which are of capacity building nature but not in the national IGF as well as provision of support to youth, women and elders participation in the global IGF, ICANN and GAC processes, as part of the learning dimension of the project.

On policy recommendations and the way forward, it was decided that there were need:

- For IGF to make available interpreters in English and French to be hired by session organizers to make sure that the diversity and language dimensions are adhered to in line with the IGF principles, hence making better use of time allocated and available intellectual resources.
- To take into account the situation of the disable in the African IGF process and on the use of its website and in the PRIDA strategy and outputs.
- To increase women participation in IG process and sustain the trend in youth involvement.
- To empower policymakers, diplomats and legislators to be able to take full part in the IG process, to understand IG policy issues and enact the right policies and laws.

In view of the success of the 2019 Open Forum, the African Union plans to organize an Open Forum in 2020.

IV. African IGF Open Forum 2020

The African Union plans to convene the 9th African Internet Governance Forum virtually in November 2020. The annual conference will be preceded by the African Union Open Forum 2020 to be held virtually on 5 November in the framework of the global IGF.

The AU Open Forum aims at discussing digital inclusion especially in relation to Capacity Building; Community Networks; Digital Transformation; 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 Forum will be linked to the SDGs, especially Goals 5, 8, 9, 10 and 17.

Like in 2019, 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.

Panelists will be derived from: the African Union Commission (Moctar Yedaly YedalyM@africa-union.org & Adil Sulieman Suliemana@africa-union.org), the secretariat of the African IGF (Makane Faye), Chair of AfIGF-MAG (Mary Uduma mnuduma@yahoo.com), PRIDA project (Sandro Bazzanella Bazzanella@gfa-group.de), UN Economic Commission for Africa (Mactar Seck, seck8@un.org). The rapporteur will be 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 all stakeholders on IG issues will be heard and that the way forward to the African IGF 2021 and the global IGF is drawn.