

Parliamentary Declaration on Digital Governance in West Africa

Sub-regional Parliamentary Track West African Internet Governance Forum 2025

23 May 2025
Abuja, Nigeria

We, parliamentarians of 10 West African countries, gathered at the West Africa Internet Governance Forum on May 22-23, 2025, in Abuja, Nigeria,

Recognize the transformative potential of digital technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), in shaping a resilient, inclusive, and safe digital future for our region. We *acknowledge* the critical role that parliaments play in developing legislative frameworks that not only facilitate technological advancement but also safeguard the rights and welfare of our citizens.

Guided by our shared commitment to inclusive, rights-based, and sustainable digital development, we *acknowledge* the vital role of parliaments in shaping the digital transformation agenda through legislative oversight and representation. We *recognize* regional and global policy frameworks, including the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy, the African Digital Compact, the Malabo Convention, the Global Digital Compact (GDC), the WSIS+20 review process, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We *affirm* our resolve to contribute to a digitally empowered West Africa that leaves no one behind.

We *emphasize* the urgent need for comprehensive awareness-raising initiatives to educate citizens about the implications of digital technologies and the associated opportunities and risks. We *express* our concern about the potential misuse of technologies, including issues related to privacy, data protection, and the risks of algorithmic bias. As such, we *commit* to developing robust legislative measures that will establish clear guidelines for the ethical use of AI and protect our citizens from its potential harms. We *urge* all member states to prioritize the establishment of national data protection laws and to engage in regional cooperation to harmonize these frameworks across West Africa.

Recognizing that data is a valuable national asset, we *call for* legislation that ensures fair revenue sharing from data generated in our countries. We believe that local data should be leveraged to attract tech companies to invest in our region, fostering economic growth and technological innovation.

We *also highlight* the importance of building digital infrastructure to enhance connectivity and resilience in our digital ecosystems. We *urge* our governments to invest

in these infrastructures and to foster equitable partnerships with the private sector to ensure that our digital environments are secure and accessible to all.

Furthermore, we *acknowledge* the need for inclusive policies that promote digital skills training, particularly for the youth. We *encourage* revising educational curricula to include digital literacy and AI education, ensuring that future generations are equipped to navigate the complexities of the digital world.

In light of these discussions, we commit to the following:

- 1. Capacity development:** We will prioritize training for parliamentarians and our support staff on digital governance, AI, cybersecurity, data protection and other emerging technologies to enhance our legislative capabilities. In addition, we will also encourage other arms of government to embark on various capacitate building initiatives to ensure a whole of government awareness of these technologies.
- 2. Collaborative & Legislative frameworks:** We will collaborate to create and implement relevant laws that harmonize and reflect regional realities and protect regional interests. We will work towards harmonized digital policies and legal frameworks across the ECOWAS region to support cross-border innovation and digital security.
- 3. Regional cooperation:** We will work towards harmonizing our data protection and digital governance laws to facilitate cross-border collaboration and ensure a cohesive regional approach.
- 4. Youth engagement:** We will foster youth participation in digital governance discussions and initiatives, creating pathways for their involvement in shaping our digital future.
- 5. Data sovereignty:** We commit to advancing legislation that strengthens the resilience and safety of national data, treating it as a national asset while promoting seamless cross border data exchange.
- 6. Transparency and accountability:** We will promote transparency and accountability between legislators and other relevant stakeholders, including civil society, the technical community, and youth.
- 7. Ethical AI development:** We will encourage ethical, transparent, and inclusive approaches to the development, use, and governance of AI and other emerging technologies in the sub-region.

- 8. Cross-border innovation:** We will work towards harmonized digital policies and legal frameworks across the ECOWAS region to support cross-border innovation and digital security.
- 9. Inter-parliamentary cooperation:** We will continue to engage in ongoing inter-parliamentary cooperation and multistakeholder dialogue through WAPNIG to build a unified voice for West Africa in global digital spaces. We will also work with partners to identify ways to shape programmes that would continue to build capacities in digital governance for parliamentarians and their staff.
- 10. Stronger voices in global governance :** We will advance whole-of-society approaches – at national and regional levels – to ensure that our interests, priorities and realities are reflected and meaningfully considered in global digital governance processes.
- 11. Budget Allocations:** We will advocate within our national parliaments for dedicated budget allocations that support parliamentarians’ participation in digital governance processes, including regional forums, global summits, capacity-building and inter-parliamentary cooperation.
- 12. Leveraging Beyond Parliamentary Terms:** Recognizing the transit nature of parliamentarians, we also commitment to engage and tap into the resources, expertise and experiences of former/other parliamentarians and stakeholders .

We *call upon* the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), national and regional IGF initiatives, regional bodies and development partners to support parliamentarians with resources, tools, research, and engagement platforms. We *urge* the private sector, civil society, youth, and the technical community to continue working in partnership with parliaments to shape a digital future that serves the public good.

This declaration represents our collective vision and commitment as West African parliamentarians to drive legislative leadership, foster regional collaboration, and support a digital transformation that is inclusive, secure, and sustainable.