



An Equitable Digital Future: An Epistemic Reference for a Pan-African Diplomatic Position on Select Sections of the WSIS+20 Zero Draft (Vol-II)

ADDENDUM: Primary Assessment (REV. 1)

Abstract

The WSIS+20 Revision 1 document (dated November 7, 2025) partially reflects the priorities outlined in the AIFAT paper, which focuses on a Pan-African diplomatic position emphasizing actionable, financially backed, and rights-respecting commitments to address digital divides in Africa and the Global South. The Rev1 document reaffirms high-level WSIS principles, aligns with the Global Digital Compact (GDC), and emphasizes inclusion, but it remains somewhat general and warrants any specific, Africa-centric or for that matter a BOP centric apparatus in reference to the amendments proposed by AIFAT. It matches in broad recognition of issues like affordability, data governance, human rights, financing, and DPI, but falls short in providing concrete targets, mechanisms, or explicit support for sovereign control and debt-linked financing. In some areas, it exceeds expectations by proposing new structures (e.g., task forces, fellowships) for ongoing implementation and alignment with the 2030 Agenda. Notably, while Africa is mentioned as a priority region (e.g., paras 5, 88), the document does not yet adopt or endorse an “Africa-centric” lens - at least a BOP centric triangulation or reference the AfCFTA, treating challenges more globally.

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Introduction

This addendum, **An Equitable Digital Future: An Epistemic Reference for a Pan-African Diplomatic Position on Select Sections of the WSIS+20 Zero Draft (Vol-II)**, provides a comprehensive assessment of the WSIS+20 Revision 1 (Rev1) negotiation text.

Aim: The primary objective is to offer an epistemic reference and an overall assessment of the Rev1 document's fidelity to the Pan-African diplomatic position, articulated in the AIFAT paper. This position emphasizes actionable, financially backed, and rights-respecting commitments essential for addressing digital divides in Africa and the Global South.

Scope: The scope is focused on a comparative analysis of the WSIS+20 Rev1 document (dated November 7, 2025) against the five core pillars of the AIFAT advisory note: Connectivity and Affordability; Digital Sovereignty, Data Governance, and Security; Protecting Human Rights and Digital Freedoms; Finance and Investment; and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Innovation. The paper also contextualizes Rev1 against the original WSIS+20 Zero Draft and the Global Digital Compact (GDC).

Methodology: The analysis employs a **point-by-point comparison** structured around the five AIFAT pillars. For each pillar, specific AIFAT priorities are juxtaposed with the corresponding text in Rev1, systematically detailing areas of **Match**, **Shortfall**, and **Exceedance**. Furthermore, a **Spatial Positioning Matrix** is used to interpret the structural placement and narrative articulation of key themes across Rev1 relative to the concise, Africa-centric demands of AIFAT.

Structural Assessment (REV. 1)

The WSIS+20 Revision 1 document (dated November 7, 2025) partially reflects the priorities outlined in the AIFAT paper, which focuses on a Pan-African diplomatic position emphasizing actionable, financially backed, and rights-respecting commitments to address digital divides in Africa and the Global South. The Rev1 document reaffirms high-level WSIS principles, aligns with the Global Digital Compact (GDC), and emphasizes inclusion, but it remains somewhat general and warrants any specific, Africa-centric or for that matter a BOP centric apparatus in reference to the amendments proposed by AIFAT. It matches in broad recognition of issues like affordability, data governance, human rights, financing, and DPI, but falls short in providing concrete targets, mechanisms, or explicit

support for sovereign control and debt-linked financing. In some areas, it exceeds expectations by proposing new structures (e.g., task forces, fellowships) for ongoing implementation and alignment with the 2030 Agenda. Notably, while Africa is mentioned as a priority region (e.g., paras 5, 88), the document does not yet adopt or endorse an “Africa-centric” lens or reference the AfCFTA, treating challenges more globally.

This addendum (vol-II) is a point-by-point comparison based on AIFAT’s five pillars, referencing relevant paragraphs in Rev1 and noting matches, shortfalls, and exceedances.

Pillar I: Connectivity and Affordability

- **AIFAT Priority:** Adopt a specific 2% GNI per capita affordability target for 2GB of mobile data (amending paras 28, 62 in the Zero Draft); emphasize resilient infrastructure and innovative financing beyond traditional loans (paras 72, 73, 76).
- **Match:** Rev1 acknowledges affordability as a key barrier to inclusion (paras 10, 16, 20, 40) and commits to improving “quality and affordability of connectivity” through collaboration, including blended finance, universal service funds, and community networks (para 26). It also calls for incentives to connect the unconnected (para 25) and multilingual content (para 27), aligning with meaningful access.
- **Falls Short:** No explicit 2% GNI target for 2GB data; para 26 TEXT is still unclear as it commits to costs “accessible to the widest section of the population” without measurable benchmarks. Resilient financing is mentioned but not detailed as moving “beyond traditional loans” or tied to specific mechanisms for African contexts.
- **Exceeds Expectations:** Goes further by reaffirming school connectivity by 2030 (para 36) and emphasizing public access facilities (e.g., libraries) for vulnerable groups (para 26), adding practical layers to inclusion.

Pillar II: Digital Sovereignty, Data Governance, and Security

- **AIFAT Priority:** Explicit support for sovereign data governance and capacity building (amending paras 94, 96); leverage models like South Africa’s POPIA; continental framework for ethical AI (paras 15, 97).
- **Match:** Rev1 emphasizes “responsible and interoperable data governance” for development, human rights, and innovation (para 78), reaffirming GDC objectives

(para 79). It supports a working group on data governance for equitable arrangements (para 80). For AI, it reaffirms GDC governance (para 81), calls for capacity building in developing countries (para 82), and proposes an AI Research program and fellowship for Global South expertise (paras 83-84).

- **Falls Short:** No mention of “sovereign” rights over national data or local infrastructure; lacks reference to models like POPIA or a continental AI framework. Security is addressed broadly (paras 52-55) but without explicit focus on mitigating technological dependency in Africa.
- **Exceeds Expectations:** Proposes concrete new initiatives like the AI fellowship and research program focused on the Global South (paras 83-84), which could build capacity beyond AIFAT’s suggestions; also links data governance to economic growth (para 78).

Pillar III: Protecting Human Rights and Digital Freedoms

- **AIFAT Priority:** Clear commitment to end disproportionate digital restrictions/censorship (amending paras 88, 99); uphold human rights (paras 9, 10); dedicated support for underserved populations (paras 14, 26).
- **Match:** Rev1 strongly reaffirms human rights as central to WSIS (paras 8, 65-72), committing to safeguards against adverse impacts from technologies (para 67) and refraining from “Internet shutdowns and measures that target Internet access” (para 73). It addresses inclusion for underserved groups like persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, and youth (paras 12, 22-23, 77), and counters technology-amplified violence, including gender-based (para 76).
- **Falls Short:** No explicit “international best practices” or safeguards against “unreasonable censorship” as proposed; the language on restrictions is strong but not as prescriptive for enforcement or monitoring. A best endeavour clause could add significant value to the overall nuance.
- **Exceeds Expectations:** Includes detailed commitments to human rights due diligence by private sectors (para 68), protection of journalists/media (para 74), and child rights in digital spaces (para 77); also integrates rights into all Action Lines (para 110), providing broader mainstreaming.

Pillar IV: Finance and Investment: Closing the Digital Funding Gap

- **AIFAT Priority:** Endorse blended financing and scale beyond private participation (para 76); link debt relief/refinancing to digital investments (para 72); prioritize climate-resilient ICT (para 73); foster Public-Private-Community Partnerships (PPCPs).
- **Match:** Rev1 calls for sustained public-private investment (para 59), blended finance (para 26), and coordinated financing for digital infrastructure/DPI (para 62). It prioritizes climate-resilient systems by addressing energy demands, sustainable design, and minimizing environmental impacts (paras 42-45). Community networks are noted as innovative mechanisms (para 26), partially aligning with PPCPs.
- **Falls Short:** No explicit linking of debt instruments to digital development; financing is general, without “results-oriented commitments” or debt relief frameworks. PPCPs are implied but not nuanced to include community engagement in planning/maintenance.
- **Exceeds Expectations:** Proposes a new task force for future financial mechanisms (para 64) and urges mainstreaming ICTs in concessional finance/work programs (para 63), potentially enabling more innovative models than AIFAT outlined.

Pillar V: Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Innovation

- **AIFAT Priority:** Support Africa-centric, interoperable DPI to accelerate AfCFTA and youth/women-led entrepreneurship (amending paras 35, 56, 13, 38).
- **Match:** Rev1 recognizes DPI as a critical driver of transformation, emphasizing resilient, safe, inclusive, and interoperable models tailored to national needs (para 17). It calls for investment in DPI (para 62) and supports youth/women in digital entrepreneurship via small business aid (para 32) and gender equality (para 76).
- **Falls Short:** No “Africa-centric” or for that matter BOP-focus or reference to AfCFTA/economic integration; DPI models are global/multiple, without emphasis on openness/security for African contexts. Youth/women entrepreneurship is mentioned but not YET linked to regulatory environments or investments as proposed.

- **Exceeds Expectations:** Links DPI to scaling social/economic opportunities (para 17) and innovation capacity-building (para 56), with broader calls for local content and skills (para 56-58), potentially fostering more inclusive innovation ecosystems.

Spatial Positioning of Rev1 Texts Relative to AIFAT Expectations

The "spatial positioning" of the revised document texts have been juxtaposed with the original documentation of the zero draft, the GDC and also an AIFAT positioning and triangulation matrix.

Comparison to the Zero Draft

The Zero Draft (released August 29, 2025, spanning ~20 pages) served as the foundational text for Rev1, drawing from WSIS+10 outcomes, stakeholder inputs, and GDC. Rev1 refines and expands it, incorporating negotiations and comments (due by October 3, 2025). Key comparisons:

- I. **Structure and Scope:** Both reaffirm WSIS vision, digital divides, and multistakeholderism, but Rev1 (18 pages) is more streamlined, with numbered paragraphs for clarity. Zero Draft covered similar sections (e.g., ICT for development, bridging divides), but Rev1 adds detailed subsections like "Data Governance" and "Environmental Sustainability."
- II. **Emerging Technologies:** Zero Draft mentioned AI and data challenges but lacked specifics; Rev1 exceeds by proposing concrete mechanisms (e.g., AI fellowship, scientific panel), building on Zero Draft's call for dialogue.
- III. **Environmental Sustainability:** A shortfall in Zero Draft (brief mentions of environmental harms); Rev1 emerges as stronger, with dedicated paragraphs on circular economy and energy efficiency.
- IV. **Human Rights:** Matches closely—both anchor in human rights law and gender mainstreaming. Rev1 exceeds with lifecycle approach and explicit protections (e.g., no Internet shutdowns), retaining Zero Draft's emphasis on integration.
- V. **Financing:** Zero Draft highlighted inequality and called for a taskforce; Rev1 matches but refines with blended finance details and SDG links, addressing Zero Draft's focus on public interest erosion.
- VI. **Governance Structures:** Both propose IGF permanence and enhanced support; Rev1 adds reporting and anti-fragmentation measures, exceeding Zero Draft's outline.
- VII. **UN Alignment:** Zero Draft proposed joint WSIS-GDC roadmap, combined 2030 review, and WSIS+30; Rev1 fully integrates this, adding annual reports and CSTD/ECOSOC roles for GDC follow-up.

Rev1 is somewhat distant in its narrative articulation of Zero Draft's broader stakeholder calls (e.g., explicit erosion of public interest) but exceeds in actionable proposals, reflecting post-draft refinements.

Comparison to the Global Digital Compact (GDC)

The GDC (adopted September 22, 2024, as Annex to the Pact for the Future) is a high-level framework for digital cooperation, emphasizing human-centered tech, divides, and governance. Rev1 explicitly reaffirms GDC (para C) and integrates its commitments into WSIS, creating synergies. Key comparisons:

- I. **Overall Alignment:** Rev1 builds on GDC's principles (e.g., open, secure digital future; human rights) and objectives (e.g., connect all by 2030, inclusive tech). Both emphasize multistakeholderism and Global South priorities.
- II. **Closing Digital Divides/Connectivity:** Matches GDC's goal to connect 2.6 billion people, schools, and hospitals (GDC para 12); Rev1 operationalizes with affordability targets and community networks (para 26), exceeding by tying to school connectivity (para 36).
- III. **Data and AI Governance:** Rev1 aligns with GDC's data principles (equitable access, privacy) and AI commitments (risk mitigation, capacity-building; GDC paras 26-30). Rev1 exceeds with WSIS-specific tools like AI fellowship and CSTD group, while GDC focuses on global panels (e.g., AI scientific panel, which Rev1 echoes).
- IV. **Human Rights:** Strong match—both root in UN Charter and rights (GDC para 4; Rev1 para 8). Rev1 exceeds with lifecycle safeguards and countering tech-amplified violence, complementing GDC's emphasis on child rights and misinformation.
- V. **Financing and DPI:** GDC calls for innovative financing (public-private pooling; para 71) and digital public goods (open-source for inclusion); Rev1 matches with task force (para 64) and DPI models (para 17), exceeding by linking to climate resilience and AfCFTA-like integration (though not explicit).
- VI. **Implementation:** GDC requests a UN implementation map (para 71); Rev1 integrates via joint roadmap (para 119) and reviews (e.g., 2027 GDC input). Rev1 exceeds with WSIS-specific structures (e.g., IGF permanence), avoiding duplication as per Zero Draft.

Rev1 is somewhat distant in its narrative articulation of GDC's broad market concentration references (e.g., Big Tech power) but exceeds in sector-specific actions, positioning WSIS as a vehicle for GDC realization.

The AIFAT Positioning Matrix

We have interpreted the relative structures as the structural placement (e.g., pages, sections, and paragraphs) of key themes in the WSIS+20 Rev1 document (dated November 7, 2025) compared to the centralized, pillar-based expectations outlined in the AIFAT advisory note (pages 1-3, with pillars explicitly on page 2). AIFAT's expectations are compact and front-loaded in the abstract, emphasizing Africa-centric, actionable targets. In contrast, Rev1 integrates these themes diffusely across its 18 pages, often in broader global terms within the Preamble, Introduction, "Bridging Digital Divides," "Human Rights and Ethical Dimensions," and implementation sections. This results in a more scattered, high-level approach versus AIFAT's focused, prescriptive roadmap. Below is a pillar-by-pillar breakdown, noting Rev1 positions (from page searches), matches, shortfalls, and exceedances.

Pillar 1: Connectivity and Affordability (AIFAT: Page 2, urging 2% GNI target for 2GB data)

- Rev1 Positioning: Scattered early and mid-document (Pages 2-5, 7; e.g., paras 10, 16, 20-26, 40). Starts in Introduction (digital divides, affordability barriers) and extends to "Bridging Digital Divides" section (incentives for unconnected, broadband costs).
- Contrast to Expectations: Matches broad recognition of affordability as a barrier but is somewhat distant in its narrative articulation on specifics (no GNI target; vague "accessible costs"). Exceeds by linking to energy/climate resilience (Page 7), adding global cooperation depth absent in AIFAT's Africa-focus.

Pillar 2: Digital Sovereignty and Security (AIFAT: Page 2, advocating sovereign data governance like POPIA)

- Rev1 Positioning: Concentrated later (Page 12; paras 78-80, under "Data Governance"). Appears in "Human Rights" and emerging tech sections, with calls for multistakeholder dialogue.
- Contrast to Expectations: Matches on interoperable data governance for development/rights but is somewhat distant in its narrative articulation on "sovereignty" language or Africa-specific models (no POPIA reference; global vs. continental). Exceeds with proposals for a CSTD dialogue and equitable data arrangements, providing forward-looking mechanisms beyond AIFAT's capacity-building emphasis.

Pillar 3: Finance and Investment (AIFAT: Page 2, demanding blended finance, debt-linked instruments)

- Rev1 Positioning: Distributed mid-document (Pages 2-3, 8-10; paras 10, 17, 46, 59-64, under "Financial Mechanisms"). Integrated into divides, enabling environments, and calls for sustained investment.
- Contrast to Expectations: Matches need for increased investment (e.g., blended finance, private sector role) but is somewhat distant in its narrative articulation on innovative ties like debt relief (general vs. results-oriented). Exceeds with a new task force for financing (Page 10) and links to SDGs/resolution 79/323, offering structured follow-up not detailed in AIFAT.

Pillar 4: Human Rights and Digital Freedom (AIFAT: Page 2, calling for end to disproportionate restrictions)

- Rev1 Positioning: Widespread throughout (Pages 1-2, 6, 8, 10-12, 16; paras 1-2, 8, 35, 52-53, 65-77, 110). Core in Introduction, "Human Rights" section, and Action Lines facilitation.
- Contrast to Expectations: Matches strong reaffirmation (e.g., no shutdowns, protections) but is somewhat distant in its narrative articulation on enforcement against censorship (principles vs. best practices). Exceeds with lifecycle safeguards, child/journalist protections, and OHCHR integration (Page 16), mainstreaming rights more comprehensively than AIFAT's focus on restrictions.

Pillar 5: Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) (AIFAT: Page 2, proposing Africa-centric, interoperable model for AfCFTA)

- Rev1 Positioning: Early and targeted (Pages 3, 10; paras 17, 62, under "ICTs for Development" and financing). Emphasizes multiple models, investment, and scalability.
- Contrast to Expectations: Matches recognition of DPI for transformation/inclusion but is somewhat distant in its narrative articulation on Africa-centrism (no AfCFTA tie; global priorities). Exceeds with emphasis on open-source goods and national tailoring, potentially enabling broader entrepreneurship beyond AIFAT's youth/women focus.

Overall, Rev1's diffuse positioning dilutes Africa-specific urgency compared to AIFAT's concise pillars, but it provides a global framework that could amplify AIFAT goals if amended.

Emerging New Directions in WSIS+20 Rev1

The WSIS+20 Revision 1 document (dated November 7, 2025) introduces several forward-looking directions that evolve the original WSIS framework, incorporating feedback from the Zero Draft and aligning with the Global Digital Compact (GDC). These emphasize institutional mechanisms, sustainability, and integration with UN agendas amid technological advancements. Below is a point-by-point analysis of key emerging themes, with paragraph references from Rev1.

1. Enhanced Governance of Emerging Technologies (e.g., AI and Data)

- Rev1 proposes specific structures like an AI Research program for the Global South (para 83), a capacity-building fellowship for developing country officials (para 84), and an Independent International Scientific Panel on AI (para 85). It also establishes a CSTD working group for data governance dialogue (para 80), focusing on equitable arrangements aligned with GDC objectives (para 79).

- This shifts toward UN-led, actionable oversight of AI risks and opportunities.

2. Environmental Sustainability and Climate-Resilient Digital Infrastructure

- A new emphasis on minimizing digitalization's environmental impact, including sustainable design, circular economy principles, and standards for product reuse/recycling (paras 42-45). It addresses energy demands from AI and data centers (para 42), promoting policy alignment for green ICT.

3. Lifecycle Approach to Human Rights in Digital Spaces

- Rev1 advances a "lifecycle" framework for human rights protection across technology design, deployment, and regulation (para 67), including private sector due diligence (para 68), countering misinformation/hate speech (para 75), and safeguards for children (para 77) and journalists (para 74). Rights are mainstreamed into all Action Lines (para 110).

4. Innovative Financing and Investment Mechanisms

- Proposes a task force for future financial mechanisms (para 64) and mainstreaming ICTs in concessional finance (para 63), highlighting blended finance and community networks (para 26). It implicitly links to debt relief through SDG alignment (para 62), emphasizing climate-resilient investments.

5. Permanent and Strengthened Internet Governance Structures

- Elevates the IGF to a permanent UN forum (para 98) with enhanced modalities, intersessional work, and annual reporting (para 97). Addresses Internet fragmentation risks (para 89) and inclusion of developing countries (para 88), drawing from NETmundial+10 (para 93).

6. Alignment and Synergies with Broader UN Agendas

- Calls for convergence between WSIS, the 2030 Agenda, GDC, and Pact for the Future (paras 104, 118), including a joint implementation roadmap (para 119) and annual reports (para 122). Schedules reviews like 2027 GDC, 2030 SDG/WSIS, and 2035 WSIS+30 (paras 123-125).

7. Capacity-Building and Measurement for Inclusion

- Focuses on digital skills and local content (paras 56-58), with updated indicators (paras 112-115) and strengthened national statistical systems (para 116) for evidence-based divide-closing.

These directions mature WSIS into a more integrated, actionable framework, responding to rapid tech changes while prioritizing the Global South.

Conclusion

The WSIS+20 Revision 1 marks a significant step in shaping the global digital order—one that reaffirms shared commitments while inviting new ambition. As the world stands at a crossroads of transformation, Africa's leadership and vision will be central to ensuring that this transition becomes not merely digital, but equitable and human-centered.

Extending the foundational principles of *An Equitable Digital Future (Vol I)*, this addendum identifies where Rev1 aligns with AIFAT's five pillars—universal connectivity and affordability, digital sovereignty and security, innovative financing and investment, the protection of human rights and digital freedoms, and interoperable digital public infrastructure. It also highlights the areas where global ambition must still evolve: from rhetorical commitments to measurable, financially backed, and rights-respecting actions that truly address structural inequities in the Global South.

The promise of the digital age will only be fulfilled when declarations translate into enduring, actionable commitments. This requires a renewed partnership—between African

nations, global allies, and the multilateral system—to transform shared principles into resilient mechanisms that deliver access, opportunity, and innovation for all. The convergence of WSIS, the Global Digital Compact, and the 2030 Agenda presents an unprecedented moment to embed digital equity at the heart of global governance.

Let this process affirm a collective purpose: to build an inclusive, secure, and sustainable digital future where every person and community can thrive. As Africa continues to illuminate pathways of innovation, youth empowerment, and digital cooperation, the world stands to benefit from its energy, creativity, and resilience. The future will be defined not by divides, but by our shared capacity to bridge them—together, in solidarity, toward a horizon of universal digital dignity.