

Advancing Africa's Digital Agenda

An AIFAT Appraisal on
WSIS+20 Rev4
Released on
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Abstract

This position paper appraises the propositions championed by the AI for Africa Taskforce (AIFAT) against the evolving WSIS+20 negotiations, as embodied in the Rev4 document dated December 13, 2025. Organized around AIFAT's five foundational pillars—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 appraisal delineates alignments, deficiencies, and enhancements. It accentuates synergies with the Global Digital Compact (GDC), adopted in September 2024, which bolsters Group of 77 (G77) imperatives for equitable access, technology transfer, and Global South inclusion, while mitigating redundancies via unified roadmaps and UN-centric frameworks. Rooted in Pan-African imperatives, including measurable targets, sovereign safeguards, and alignment with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the paper weaves in complementary Global South viewpoints, such as human-AI symbiosis and hybrid financing paradigms. As a benchmark, it incorporates Brazil's 2025 BRICS digital stances, encompassing the BRICS Leaders' Declaration on Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence and the Rio de Janeiro Declaration, underscoring digital sovereignty, multipolar AI dissemination, and South-South collaboration. The appraisal also critiques positions from entities like Japan (JPN), which frequently converge with Western brackets to attenuate G77 proposals. It culminates in augmented substantive recommendations for African nations to fortify their diplomatic posture through alliances with G77 and BRICS counterparts, prioritizing Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP)-centric triangulation, debt-linked instruments, and ethical AI oversight to secure equitable digital dividends in harmony with the 2030 Agenda and GDC.

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Introduction: The African Imperative in WSIS+20's Evolving Landscape

As the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)+20 high-level meeting convenes on December 16-17, 2025, in New York, Rev4 of the outcome document represents a pivotal iteration in global digital governance. From AIFAT's vantage, this revision signals incremental progress from prior drafts (e.g., Rev2 dated December 3, 2025), yet it perpetuates structural asymmetries that undermine Africa's quest for digital sovereignty and inclusive growth. Building on AIFAT's prior advisories (Mamun, Umegboli, and Matin, 2025a; AIFAT, 2025a), this appraisal evaluates Rev4 against our five pillars, informed by Pan-African consultations and alignments with G77 and BRICS frameworks.

Rev4 reaffirms WSIS's 2005 vision of a people-centered Information Society (para. 1), acknowledges connectivity growth (para. 6), and integrates the GDC (preamble D), echoing G77 calls for coherence. However, it falls short in operationalizing binding commitments, often favoring voluntary language that the more developed countries and their historic allies have traditionally endorsed to dilute equity-focused proposals. AIFAT urges African negotiators to leverage AfCFTA synergies and BoP empowerment—transitioning populations from passive beneficiaries to active producers via frugal innovation and market connectivity (Mamun, 2025b)—to advocate for transformative amendments.

Pillar 1: Connectivity and Affordability

Alignments

Rev4 aligns partially with AIFAT's advocacy for a 2% GNI affordability target for 2GB mobile data (ITU, 2022). It recognizes persistent divides (paras. 19-28), citing ITU data on disparities (e.g., 94% connectivity in high-income vs. 23% in low-income countries, para. 21), and commits to affordable broadband costs (para. 27). This resonates with GDC's emphasis on universal meaningful connectivity and BRICS's multipolar digital infrastructure push (BRICS, 2025a). References to community networks and universal access funds (para. 26) mirror AIFAT's last-mile solutions for remote areas (Mamun, Umegboli, and Matin, 2025b).

Shortfalls

Despite these nods, Rev4 omits enforceable targets, relying on more oblique commitments to "connect the unconnected" (para. 26) without timelines or metrics. It neglects BoP-specific barriers like energy access in off-grid communities, diverging from AIFAT's integration of solar-powered innovations (Mamun, 2025c). Softening G77 proposals for mandatory affordability benchmarks, perpetuating Africa's 67%

unconnected population (ITU, 2025) was likely accentuated by mild reconfigurations in the traditional alignments.

Recommendations

Africa need to propose amendments inserting the 2% GNI target (para. 27) and BoP-centric hubs for direct market links, bypassing intermediaries. Ally with BRICS for South-South financing models, ensuring connectivity advances AfCFTA integration.

Pillar 2: Digital Sovereignty, Data Governance, and Security

Alignments

Rev4 advances sovereignty implicitly through data governance (para. 81), urging interoperable frameworks that protect privacy and foster innovation. This echoes AIFAT's call for models like South Africa's POPIA (Policy, 2024) and BRICS's emphasis on multipolar AI (BRICS, 2025b). Cybersecurity sections (paras. 53-57) recognize malicious threats to infrastructure, aligning with G77 demands for capacity-building in developing nations.

Shortfalls

Sovereignty remains unexplicit, with no prohibitions on unilateral data flows or vendor lock-in—critical for mitigating Africa's technological dependencies (AIFAT, 2025b). Rev4's voluntary approach to data localization (para. 82) falls short of AIFAT's robust national frameworks, and some renewed positions may have diluted G77's calls for binding safeguards against exploitation.

Recommendations

Advocate for explicit language on "digital sovereignty" (insert in para. 5), including mandatory data localization for sensitive sectors. Strengthen alliances with Brazil for BRICS-inspired multipolar governance, incorporating human-AI symbiosis to ensure ethical data use amid AI proliferation.

Pillar 3: Finance and Investment

Alignments

Rev4's establishment of an ITU-led task force on financial mechanisms (para. 67) and references to blended finance (para. 65) align with AIFAT's innovative financing demands, including debt-linked instruments for resilient infrastructure (AIFAT, 2025a).

It acknowledges the Sevilla Commitment (preamble F), supporting GDC's resource-efficient synergies and BRICS's South-South investment models.

Shortfalls

The document still falls significantly short specificity on closing Africa's ICT funding gap (estimated at USD 100 billion annually, AIFAT, 2025c), with voluntary calls for investment (para. 62) insufficient against JPN-Western preferences for market-driven approaches. BoP-focused hybrid models (e.g., microfinance-blockchain) are absent, diverging from AIFAT's triangulation for bottom-up empowerment (Mamun, 2025a).

Recommendations

Propose amendments mandating debt-for-digital swaps (para. 66) and BoP-centric funds. Leverage G77-BRICS coalitions to integrate AfCFTA-linked investments, ensuring finance catalyzes youth and women-led entrepreneurship.

Pillar 4: Protecting Human Rights and Digital Freedoms

Alignments

Rev4 centers human rights (paras. 68-80), reaffirming offline-online parity (para. 70) and UN Guiding Principles (para. 71), aligning with AIFAT's prohibition on arbitrary shutdowns (Global Network Initiative, 2025). It addresses harms to societies (para. 37), echoing GDC's rights-respecting tech and BRICS's ethical AI declarations.

Shortfalls

Language on shutdowns is weak, lacking mandatory accountability (para. 70), which perpetuates Africa's economic losses from disruptions (estimated at USD 2 billion yearly, AIFAT, 2025b). Dilution of G77 proposals risks non-binding commitments, overlooking BoP vulnerabilities in rights abuses.

Recommendations

Inserting a clearer set of constraints on disproportionate restrictions (para. 71), with redress mechanisms. Advocate via G77 for AI governance integrating human symbiosis, protecting freedoms in digital spaces. A synthetic configuration is emerging and there needs to be awareness about

Pillar 5: Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Innovation

Alignments

Rev4 recognizes DPI as a driver of transformation (para. 17), supporting interoperable models (para. 81) and innovation ecosystems (paras. 48-51). This aligns with AIFAT's Africa-centric DPI for AfCFTA (Carnegie Endowment, 2025) and BRICS's multipolar innovation.

Shortfalls

Definitions still remain somewhat oblique (para. 17), without BoP-tailored frugal innovations or tech transfer mandates (para. 51). G77's calls for indigenous DPI, at the cost of Africa's youth-led entrepreneurship might have some serious repercussions as and when time comes for incorporating the epistemological underpinnings into the guardrails of the emergent AI ecosystems globally.

Recommendations

Amend for interoperable, sovereign DPI frameworks (para. 17), incorporating frugal pilots and BoP market connectivity. Strengthen South-South ties for ethical AI innovation aligned with GDC.

Synergies with Global Digital Compact (GDC), G77, and BRICS: Avoiding Duplication While Maximizing Equity and Sovereignty

Revision 4 of the WSIS+20 Outcome Document integrates references to the Global Digital Compact (GDC), notably in paragraphs related to coordinated implementation (e.g., alignment with UNGIS mechanisms for policy coherence). This offers potential synergies by building on the GDC's commitments to universal connectivity, data governance, and AI ethics (United Nations, 2024). However, AIFAT cautions against risks of duplication and fragmentation, which could dilute focus and resources. Instead, Pan-African diplomacy should advocate for strengthened "UNGIS roadmaps" to serve as unified implementation frameworks, ensuring WSIS+20 complements rather than overlaps with the GDC.

Alignment with the "G77's longstanding demands" for equity in global digital governance is critical, as the Group has consistently emphasized bridging digital divides, technology transfer, and prioritizing development-oriented outcomes without preempting WSIS processes (G77 statements on WSIS+20 and GDC inputs). Similarly, integration should

reinforce “BRICS principles” from the 2025 Rio de Janeiro Declaration and associated Leaders’ Statement on AI Governance, which prioritize “digital sovereignty”, equitable access, open-source collaboration, and protection against data divides—countering perceived dilutions in negotiations influenced by Japan and Western proposals that favor multistakeholder models over intergovernmental oversight (BRICS, 2025a; BRICS, 2025b).

Africa remains disproportionately affected by digital divides: the ITU’s 2025 ICT Development Index shows stark urban-rural gaps, with internet usage at 57% urban versus only 23% rural—the widest regional disparity globally (ITU, 2025). Moreover, record internet shutdowns in 2024–2025 (over 21 incidents across 15 African countries, with economic losses exceeding \$1.5 billion in sub-Saharan Africa alone) underscore threats to human rights and inclusive growth (Access Now/#KeepItOn reports; Global Network Initiative, 2025).

Substantive Recommendations for Pan-African Diplomacy

1. Strategic Alliances: Forge coordinated G77-BRICS blocs during negotiations to insert binding language on key pillars, including data sovereignty, technology transfer, and equitable finance. This leverages G77’s focus on development justice and BRICS’s emphasis on countering “data colonialism” through UN-anchored multilateralism (BRICS, 2025a; Mamun, 2025a; Mamun et al., 2025a).
2. BoP Triangulation: Prioritize hybrid (public-private) finance models and frugal innovation to drive bottom-up growth for Bottom-of-the-Pyramid (BoP) populations, who represent the majority in Africa yet face persistent exclusion. Integrate “dual-core” financing mechanisms to empower local entrepreneurship and reduce dependencies (Mamun, 2025c; Mamun, 2025b; AIFAT, 2025b).
3. Ethical AI Oversight: Embed principles of human-AI symbiosis and responsible governance (e.g., para. 84 on emerging technologies), drawing from BRICS calls for inclusive, sovereignty-respecting AI frameworks that prioritize Global South needs and bridge divides (BRICS, 2025a).
4. Monitoring Mechanisms: Advocate for Africa-led indicators and multistakeholder oversight bodies to track progress on closing divides, incorporating ITU affordability targets and region-specific metrics on shutdowns, rural connectivity, and BoP inclusion (ITU, 2022; ITU, 2025; Carnegie Endowment, 2025; Mamun et al., 2025a).

These recommendations, grounded in Pan-African positions, aim to ensure WSIS+20 delivers an equitable, sovereignty-affirming digital future (AIFAT, 2025a; Mamun et al., 2025b).

Conclusion: Catalyzing a Sovereign Digital Africa

The document delivers a critical assessment of the current fourth revision of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process outcomes. It posits that the "Rev4" update is largely characterized by incremental, insufficient advancements that fail to address fundamental systemic inequities in the global digital landscape. The core argument is that this revision is critically deficient and necessitates a fundamental overhaul, one that must be anchored by the principles of the African Initiative for Fairness and Accountability in Technology (AIFAT) framework. The adoption of this AIFAT-guided methodology is presented not merely as an option, but as a paramount necessity for comprehensively identifying and rectifying the deep-seated structural imbalances that persist within the WSIS framework and its resulting policy architecture.

The Transformative Opportunity for the Global South

The forthcoming **WSIS+20 review** presents a pivotal moment for the Global South, particularly for African negotiators and stakeholders. By proactively and strategically championing the core pillars of the AIFAT framework, they can leverage this moment to execute a truly transformative policy shift. The AIFAT framework is structured around four essential and interlinked pillars, each designed to foster an equitable and inclusive digital future:

1. **Inclusive Digital Governance:** Shifting from a centralized model to one that ensures the meaningful participation and equal voice of all nations, particularly those from the Global South, in shaping global digital norms and regulations.
2. **Technology Transfer:** Instituting mechanisms that facilitate the ethical and accessible transfer of advanced and emerging technologies, moving beyond restrictive intellectual property regimes that often hinder development in low- and middle-income countries.
3. **Capacity Building:** Committing to comprehensive, long-term programs for developing local expertise, technical skills, and educational infrastructure necessary for independent digital innovation and maintenance.
4. **Equitable Access to Digital Infrastructure:** Prioritizing and financing the expansion of affordable, resilient, and high-speed digital connectivity—including broadband and satellite technologies—to underserved and marginalized communities worldwide.

Elevating WSIS+20 into a Beacon for Resilience and Development

The focused efforts of African and Global South negotiators, informed by this strategic alignment with AIFAT, have the potential to elevate the upcoming WSIS+20 review far beyond a standard, routine **mere status update**. Instead, this strategic integration can convert the review into a powerful and definitive **beacon for Global South resilience**. This approach ensures that the future trajectory of the information society is not only aligned with but also directly contributes to and is **fully integrated with the broader objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

Specifically, the AIFAT-led transformation is critical for:

- **Bridging the Digital Divide:** Moving beyond statistics on access to addressing the quality, affordability, and meaningful use of digital technologies.
- **Fostering a Truly Inclusive Global Digital Economy:** Ensuring that the benefits of the digital revolution are shared equitably, empowering small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and marginalized populations in developing nations.

In conclusion, the document underscores a critical mandate: the ultimate **success of WSIS+20 hinges entirely on the integration of AIFAT's principles** not as peripheral recommendations, but as the **fundamental, non-negotiable basis for achieving genuine digital justice** and building a truly inclusive, sustainable, and equitable global information society.

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