



Note on An African Perspective for the WSIS+20 Zero Draft Outcome Document and Its Impacts on Data Security, Data Sovereignty, Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Finance.

Abstract

The African Imperative: Towards a Sovereign and Equitable Digital Future in WSIS+20

This analysis outlines the consolidated African position on the WSIS+20 Zero Draft Outcome Document, advocating for a profound recalibration of global digital governance to prioritize digital sovereignty, human rights, and genuine inclusivity. The current draft, while acknowledging global connectivity goals, is deemed inadequate in addressing the systemic and unique challenges faced by the African continent, thereby risking the perpetuation of existing digital and economic dependencies.

Critique of the WSIS+20 Zero Draft from an African Perspective

Drawing upon extensive regional consultations, including outcomes from major continental declarations, this document highlights the draft's critical shortcomings in translating aspirational commitments into enforceable obligations tailored for the African context. Key areas of concern include:

1. **Cross-Border Data Flows and Data Exploitation:** The draft fails to establish robust mechanisms to ensure equitable value capture from data generated in Africa, allowing unchecked cross-border data flows that often benefit foreign entities and compromise national economic self-determination.
2. **Technological Dependencies and Vendor Lock-in:** Insufficient emphasis is placed on promoting local digital infrastructure and indigenous innovation, which perpetuates reliance on dominant foreign technologies and hinders the development of competitive African digital ecosystems.
3. **Digital Authoritarianism and Internet Shutdowns:** The draft's language on freedom of expression and access is too weak. It lacks a clear, mandatory prohibition and accountability framework for the increasing trend of arbitrary internet shutdowns and service disruptions—a tactic that severely impacts civil liberties, democratic processes, and national economies.

Key Proposals for an Enforceable African-Centric Outcome

To transform the WSIS+20 process into a platform for sustainable digital transformation, the African perspective proposes concrete amendments focused on creating enforceable obligations:

- **Strengthening Equitable Data Governance (Para 94):** The current text must be

strengthened to mandate principles of data solidarity and equitable sharing of economic benefits derived from data exploitation. This includes promoting data localization and establishing African regional data centers and cloud infrastructure to assert genuine digital sovereignty.

- **Moratorium and Accountability for Internet Disruptions (Para 88):** A firm global moratorium must be imposed on all arbitrary and disproportionate internet disruptions. The final Outcome Document must establish a mechanism for monitoring and public reporting on such incidents, alongside provisions for technical assistance to countries committed to upholding continuous and open internet access.
- **Integrating Africa-Centric Ethical Frameworks for AI (Para 97):** The deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies across the continent must be guided by ethical frameworks rooted in African values and aligned with the African Union's Agenda 2063. This is crucial to mitigate bias, ensure human rights protection, and harness AI for inclusive development without exacerbating social and economic inequalities.

Impact Analysis: Africa's Digital Trajectory

The proposed amendments are designed to create a conducive environment for accelerated and equitable digital growth across five critical dimensions:

1. **Data Security and Cybersecurity:** By enhancing mandatory international cooperation on cybersecurity, while simultaneously embedding strong human rights safeguards, the Outcome Document can help African states build resilience against cyber threats without creating avenues for state-sponsored surveillance or digital repression.
2. **Data Sovereignty and Infrastructure:** Promoting investment in local and regional internet exchange points (IXPs), data centers, and fiber optic networks is vital to reduce reliance on foreign infrastructure, lower connectivity costs, and safeguard sensitive national data.
3. **Innovation and Technological Alignment:** Accelerating the responsible adoption of emerging technologies, particularly through public-private partnerships focused on capacity building and skills development, will ensure that technological advancement aligns directly with Africa's sustainable development goals.
4. **Entrepreneurship and Startup Ecosystems:** Policies that promote inclusive digital financial services, harmonize regulatory frameworks across regional blocs, and prioritize local content development are essential to unlock the full potential of Africa's burgeoning startup ecosystem.
5. **Finance and Resource Mobilization:** The document must commit developed countries and multilateral institutions to mobilizing significant, predictable, and concessional financial resources to close the digital infrastructure investment gap in Africa, ensuring that digital finance policies are inclusive and accessible to marginalized populations.

Call for African Leadership

Ultimately, the transformation of the WSIS+20 process requires active, coordinated, and assertive African leadership in the negotiation process. The goal is to move beyond mere participation to fundamentally reshape the global digital architecture, countering prevailing geopolitical imbalances and ensuring that the final outcome serves as a platform for an equitable, sustainable, and sovereign digital future for the continent.

Table of Contents

<u>Abstract</u>	2
<u>Table of Contents</u>	5
<u>1. Introduction: Digital Governance as a Developmental Imperative</u>	7
<u>2. Problem Statement</u>	7
<u>3. Aim and Scope</u>	7
3.1. Aim	7
3.2. Scope	8
3.3 The Issue:	8
<u>4.0 A Global Issue</u>	9
4.1 The Inherent Global Nature of WSIS+20	9
4.2 Data Sovereignty, Security, and Global Interdependence	9
4.3 Human Rights and the Global Digital Future	10
<u>5.0 Institutional Voids: an African Perspective List</u>	15
Institutional Voids, the Bottom-of-the-Pyramid (BOP), and Digital Governance in the Global South: An Analysis for WSIS+20	15
I. Defining the Challenge: Institutional Voids in Emerging and BOP Markets	15
II. The Relevance to Digital Governance and the WSIS+20 Agenda	15
III. Bridging Voids: Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Ethical Technology Deployment	16
6.0 A Pan-African Perspective on the Zero Draft	25
6.1 Africa's Stance on the WSIS+20 Zero Draft: A Call for Equitable Digital Governance and Sovereign Development	25
6.2 Prioritizing Access, Affordability, and Public Investment	25
6.3 Advocacy for Digital Sovereignty and Geopolitical Balance	25
6.4 Integrating Regional Strategies and Ethical Technology	26
6.5 Transforming the WSIS+20 Process	26
6.6 Impact on Data Security	26
6.7 Impact on Data Sovereignty	28
6.8 Impact on Innovation	28
6.8.1 Catalyzing Innovation through Technology Transfer and AI Adoption:	29
6.8.2 Bridging the Digital Divide and Enhancing Digital Inclusion:	29
6.8.3 Opportunities for Ethical and Inclusive Innovation:	29
6.8.4 Mitigating Risks and Addressing Inequalities:	29
6.8.5 Toward a Coordinated Global Strategy for Africa's Digital Future:	30
6.9 Impact on Entrepreneurship	30
6.9.1 Enhancing African Entrepreneurship Through the WSIS 25 Framework	30
6.9.2 Key African Perspectives and Enabling Environments:	30
6.9.3 Anticipated Impacts and Existing Models:	30

6.9.4 Challenges and Threats to Progress:	31
6.10 The Role of Gender and Inclusivity:	31
6.11 The Risk of Exacerbating Divides:	31
6.12 Impact on Finance	31
6.12.1 Financial Dimensions of the Zero Draft and Africa's Digital Agenda	31
6.12.2 Mobilizing Capital and Market Potential:	32
6.12.3 Addressing Debt and Sovereignty:	32
6.13 Challenges and the Need for Coordinated Action:	32
6.14 Strategic Coordination:	32
7.0 Way Forward: African Perspectives on the WSIS+20 Zero Draft: Catalyzing a Just Digital Future	33
7.1 A Critical Assessment from the African Continent	33
7.2 Key Imperatives for Enhanced Commitment and Action:	33
7.3 Profound Impact and Continental Opportunity:	34
7.4 The Imperative for Resolute African Leadership:	35
7.5 A Decisive Call to Action:	35
8.0 References	37

1. Introduction: Digital Governance as a Developmental Imperative

The two-decade review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20) in 2025 provides a crucial opportunity to align global digital governance with the developmental priorities of the African continent. This document, developed through consolidated input from African member states and regional bodies, serves as a focused intervention on the critical intersection of digital sovereignty, security, and fundamental human rights. Africa's rapid digital adoption is simultaneously an opportunity for massive economic growth and a source of new vulnerabilities, particularly concerning data control, cybersecurity threats, and the suppression of digital freedoms. The commitments within the WSIS+20 Zero Draft must transcend aspirational language; they must become enforceable, rights-respecting obligations that safeguard the burgeoning digital economies and civil spaces of the continent. This paper is specifically intended for stakeholders negotiating the outcome document, providing them with the necessary strategic rationale and evidence-based proposals to ensure the resulting text is robust, equitable, and development-oriented.

2. Problem Statement

African nations are grappling with a dual challenge: the rapid increase in cross-border data flows that often bypass domestic regulatory oversight, and the growing incidence of arbitrary state actions that compromise the stability and human rights integrity of the internet. The current Zero Draft, while acknowledging the importance of a secure and rights-respecting digital environment, lacks the prescriptive language necessary to mitigate these specific, high-impact risks. Unfettered external control over data infrastructure undermines digital sovereignty and economic self-determination, while the practice of internet shutdowns inflicts severe damage on local economies, disrupts essential services, and violates fundamental rights to freedom of expression and assembly (Global Network Initiative, 2025). Therefore, the primary problem is the insufficient commitment in the Zero Draft to establish enforceable global standards for equitable data governance and the unambiguous protection against digital repression, which are non-negotiable prerequisites for sustainable digital development in Africa.

3. Aim and Scope

3.1. Aim

The aim of this document is to secure concrete, actionable textual amendments within the WSIS+20 outcome document that uphold the principles of Digital Sovereignty, Data Security, and Human Rights for African nations. Specifically, it aims to achieve clear global consensus and commitments on:

1. Strengthening Data Governance: Ensuring African countries possess the capacity and sovereign right to govern the collection, storage, and cross-border transfer of national data (Para 94).
2. Safeguarding Digital Freedoms: Establishing explicit international recognition and protection against arbitrary internet shutdowns (Para 88).
3. Promoting Ethical Governance: Integrating Africa-centric ethical considerations into frameworks for emerging technologies like AI (Para 97).

3.2. Scope

This document focuses exclusively on the thematic areas of Digital Sovereignty (Pillar II) and Human Rights and Digital Freedoms (Pillar III) as defined in the overall African strategic position for WSIS+20. It analyzes relevant articles of the Zero Draft (specifically, Paragraphs 10, 88, 94, and 97) and provides evidence-based use cases from various African countries (e.g., Kenya, South Africa, Sudan) to substantiate the proposed amendments. While recognizing the interdependence of all pillars, the scope of this paper is limited to governance, security, and rights, ensuring a dedicated focus for negotiators in these critical areas.

3.3 The Issue:

The Zero Draft of the outcome document for the WSIS+20 Review, released on 29 August 2025, serves as a foundational text for evaluating two decades of progress toward a people-centred, inclusive, and development-oriented Information Society. It reaffirms commitments to bridging digital divides, promoting multi-stakeholder cooperation, and aligning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Pact for the Future, and the Global Digital Compact (GDC). From an African perspective, the draft is viewed as a critical opportunity to address continent-specific challenges, such as persistent connectivity gaps, high data costs, and unequal participation in global digital governance. African nations, represented through bodies like the African Union (AU) and regional consultations, emphasize the need for the document to prioritize equitable access, technology transfer, and capacity building for countries in special situations, including African states, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), as noted in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the draft.

African perspectives, drawn from regional summits, submissions, and declarations (e.g., the Dar es Salaam and Cotonou Declarations), call for a stronger focus on human rights-based approaches, gender inclusion, and sustainable digital transformation to support Agenda 2063. The draft's recognition of digital divides (para 12) and emerging technologies (para 15) resonates with Africa's push for leadership in WSIS+20, countering digital authoritarianism and ensuring benefits from innovation are not concentrated in the Global North. This note explores the African viewpoint on the document and assesses its potential impacts on data security, data sovereignty, innovation, entrepreneurship, and finance, highlighting both opportunities and challenges.

4.0 A Global Issue

4.1 The Inherent Global Nature of WSIS+20

The necessity for this review to be inherently global stems from the fundamental reality that digital technologies and the internet operate without respect for national borders. This omnipresent connectivity generates interconnected challenges that touch every nation, from the most technologically advanced economies to the least developed countries.

- **Bridging the Digital Divide:** A core global challenge is the persistent digital divide, where billions of people worldwide still lack reliable, affordable, and meaningful access to connectivity. This is not a regional problem; it is a global impediment to equitable participation in the digital economy, hindering global trade, limiting access to quality education, and frustrating progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). International cooperation is essential to mobilize the investment and policy reforms needed to extend infrastructure and digital literacy universally.
- **Alignment with Global Governance Initiatives:** The WSIS+20 Zero Draft, disseminated in August 2025, robustly reasserts the commitment to enhanced international cooperation. This aligns the review process with broader, concurrent UN initiatives, notably the **Global Digital Compact** and the **Pact for the Future**. This alignment underscores a critical global consensus: fragmented, national-centric approaches to digital policy risk exacerbating worldwide inequalities and could fundamentally obstruct collective progress toward the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2025; International Telecommunication Union, 2025).

4.2 Data Sovereignty, Security, and Global Interdependence

Data sovereignty and security have emerged as critically intertwined global issues within the WSIS+20 framework, reflecting significant geopolitical and economic tensions in the digital space.

- **Dominance and Dependency:** The cross-border flow of data is overwhelmingly managed and monetized by a select few multinational technology corporations. This concentration of power frequently leads to systemic dependencies, which in turn can undermine national control over strategic data assets and compromise economic self-determination for nations across the globe (African Leadership Magazine, 2025; New America, 2025). The review must address how to foster a more decentralized and equitable data ecosystem.
- **Transnational Cyber Threats:** In the contemporary digital era, cyber threats are entirely transnational. Attacks such as sophisticated ransomware campaigns, state-sponsored

hacking operations, and attacks on critical infrastructure know no geographic boundaries. Consequently, weak governance, substandard security protocols, or lack of capacity in one region can instantly compromise globally interdependent systems, spanning financial networks, energy grids, and healthcare infrastructure.

- **The Fragmentation Debate:** The review highlights the urgent necessity for establishing robust international standards concerning cybersecurity and data localization policies. The goal is to prevent exploitation by malicious foreign actors. However, this raises complex debates over "digital fragmentation," where heightened state assertions of data sovereignty, if poorly managed, could inadvertently weaken the established multistakeholder models that have been instrumental in sustaining the open, unified, and interoperable internet (European External Action Service, 2025).
- **Erosion of Trust and Stability:** This global interdependence means that systemic failures in data protection—such as widespread data breaches, pervasive surveillance overreach, or inadequate legal frameworks—do more than just erode trust in digital spaces. They fundamentally amplify global vulnerabilities, possessing the potential to trigger significant international conflicts or widespread economic disruptions.

4.3 Human Rights and the Global Digital Future

The protection and promotion of human rights in the digital realm elevate WSIS+20 into an undeniable global concern, as fundamental freedoms are increasingly challenged online.

- **Universal Principles Under Threat:** Universal principles of human rights—including freedom of expression, the right to privacy, and freedom of assembly online—are enshrined in international law. Yet, these rights are currently facing escalating threats worldwide, including arbitrary internet shutdowns, systematic state censorship, and the insidious impact of algorithmic biases across various platforms and applications (Global Network Initiative and Global Partners Digital, 2025; Global Partners Digital, 2025). These violations stifle global discourse and innovation.
- **Countering Digital Authoritarianism:** The Zero Draft emphatically calls for significantly stronger protections against the rise of digital authoritarianism. It recognizes that such violations, which are alarmingly prevalent across diverse geopolitical contexts, actively suppress civic engagement, limit political dissent, and fragment the global information environment.
- **Ethical Governance of Emerging Technologies:** By embedding human rights standards more robustly into the outcomes, the review aims to proactively counter the risks posed by emerging technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI). This involves ensuring that AI systems are governed ethically to prevent them from perpetuating societal inequalities, enabling mass surveillance on a planetary scale, or being deployed in ways that violate human dignity (Group of 77, 2025; United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development, 2025; Global Network Initiative, 2025).

Ultimately, the outcomes forged at WSIS+20 will exert a profound and lasting influence on the entire world's digital future. The complexity and global reach of these challenges necessitate inclusive, effective, and broad multistakeholder participation from governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical community, and international organizations. The overarching goal must be to foster a rights-respecting and resilient digital environment that delivers benefits for all of humanity rather than merely deepening the existing economic, social, and political divides.

<u>Country/Region</u>	<u>Major Issues</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
<u>Africa (e.g., Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, Tanzania)</u>	Persistent digital divides in access, affordability, and skills, especially in rural and underserved areas; high data costs (up to 6.5% of monthly income); internet shutdowns and surveillance; limited participation in global governance due to financial and technical constraints; emerging tech risks like AI ethics and data sovereignty; gender and youth inclusion gaps; infrastructure deficits in power and connectivity.	Bridge digital divides through affordable broadband and digital literacy; strengthen multistakeholder governance with African leadership; promote technology transfer and capacity building for AI and green ICTs; ensure human rights protections online; align with Agenda 2063 and GDC for equitable development; advocate for data sovereignty and regional cooperation via AU; focus on innovation hubs and entrepreneurship to drive economic inclusion.
<u>Bangladesh</u>	Digital repression via laws like Cyber Security Act enabling shutdowns and surveillance; gender digital divide and cyberbullying; affordability barriers in rural areas; post-2024 political shifts highlighting censorship;	Advance “Smart Bangladesh 2041” with e-services and literacy; push for rights-based reforms in digital laws; secure international funding for connectivity and devices; emphasize multistakeholder engagement post-reforms;

<u>Country/Region</u>	<u>Major Issues</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
	limited civil society participation; emerging tech access gaps.	address AI ethics and technology transfer for SDGs; align WSIS with GDC to avoid duplication.
<u>Brazil</u>	Inequality in digital access and content; environmental sustainability in digital infrastructure; information integrity and IP challenges; rushed WSIS+20 timeline affecting coordination; low stakeholder attendance in consultations.	Strengthen multistakeholderism via IGF renewal and CGI.br model; promote Digital Public Infrastructure and meaningful connectivity; integrate human rights and gender perspectives; support GDC synergy for AI and sustainability; advocate for inclusive governance to reduce divides.
<u>Chile</u>	Connectivity gaps and poverty impacts on digital access; gender disparities in cybersecurity; AI adoption risks without ethical frameworks; balancing security with rights.	Advance National AI Plan and cybersecurity policy with human rights focus; prioritize e-education and digital literacy for SDGs; endorse multistakeholder models in LACIGF; ensure gender inclusion and data protection; align WSIS with GDC for universal access.
<u>China</u>	State control over internet leading to censorship and surveillance exports; human rights restrictions in digital	Promote state-centric governance and Digital Silk Road; emphasize cybersecurity and

<u>Country/Region</u>	<u>Major Issues</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
	spaces; geopolitical tensions in tech governance; dependency on foreign tech amid sovereignty push.	sovereignty; advocate for intergovernmental coordination over multistakeholderism; focus on development via tech transfer to Global South; align WSIS with GDC for controlled emerging tech.
<u>European Union (EU)</u>	Fragmented multistakeholder engagement; need for transparency in review process; emerging threats like AI risks and disinformation; balancing innovation with rights.	Establish WSIS+20 Multistakeholder Sounding Board for inclusivity; uphold human rights-based approaches and NetMundial+10 guidelines; strengthen IGF and align with GDC; prioritize safe, secure digital spaces and equity in governance.
<u>India</u>	Digital divides in rural and gender access; new AI-induced inequalities; sovereignty vs. multistakeholderism tensions; resource gaps for emerging tech; multilingual content needs.	Bridge divides via Aadhaar/UPI and IndiaAI Mission; support multistakeholderism with sovereignty safeguards; advocate for capacity building and DPI transfer to Global South; integrate human rights and open AI; renew IGF with UN funding.
<u>Russia</u>	Advocacy for state-led control amid geopolitical	Push state-centric internet governance; emphasize

<u>Country/Region</u>	<u>Major Issues</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
	conflicts; cybersecurity threats and sanctions impacting tech access; human rights critiques in digital repression.	national security and sovereignty; coordinate intergovernmentally for WSIS outcomes; focus on countering Western dominance in digital standards.
<u>United States (US)</u>	Balancing multistakeholder leadership with emerging challenges like AI governance and supply chain vulnerabilities; disinformation and privacy concerns; global equity in tech access.	Reinforce multistakeholder models and IGF; promote human rights and open internet; support GDC for AI ethics and infrastructure; address divides through partnerships and innovation.
<u>Group of 77 (G77) Developing Countries</u>	Widening digital divides in broadband affordability and quality; unequal access to emerging technologies; financial and institutional barriers to governance participation; exacerbation of inequalities by uneven digital benefits.	Address divides via equitable ICT access and financing; promote innovation and digital economy for inclusion; ensure consensus-based review with action-oriented outcomes; reaffirm WSIS for development, aligning with SDGs and GDC.

5.0 Institutional Voids: an African Perspective List

Institutional Voids, the Bottom-of-the-Pyramid (BOP), and Digital Governance in the Global South: An Analysis for WSIS+20

I. Defining the Challenge: Institutional Voids in Emerging and BOP Markets

Institutional voids represent critical gaps or deficiencies in the formal and informal institutional infrastructure essential for the smooth and efficient functioning of markets and societies. These deficiencies encompass a lack of robust regulatory systems, effective market intermediaries, reliable legal enforcement mechanisms, and high-quality information infrastructures. While they exist in various forms globally, these voids are particularly pronounced in emerging economies and the vast Bottom-of-the-Pyramid (BOP) markets. In these contexts, they manifest as chronic problems such as high levels of corruption, profound supply chain inefficiencies, significant technology and skill gaps, and pervasive information asymmetries. Such systemic deficiencies distort resource allocation, impede rational decision-making, and significantly increase the cost of doing business and living.

The seminal **BOP theory**, championed by C.K. Prahalad, fundamentally reframes the world's poorest populations—estimated at billions living on less than \$2.50 per day—not merely as aid recipients but as a massive, underserved market. This perspective posits that innovative, affordable products and services, tailored to their unique circumstances, can simultaneously drive sustainable profits for businesses and contribute to poverty eradication through a model of inclusive capitalism (Prahalad, 2004; Prahalad and Hammond, 2002).

Building upon this foundation, **Dr. Syed Muntasir Mamun's** research offers a critical examination of institutional voids specifically within BOP markets across the Global South. His work emphasizes that these systemic deficiencies are not benign but result in staggering socioeconomic costs, including the annual loss of trillions of dollars globally due to illicit financial flows, fraud, and mismanagement. These losses do not merely represent economic inefficiency; they actively exacerbate poverty, exclusion, and inequality (Mamun, 2021; Mamun, 2025). Crucially, Mamun highlights that these voids are often deeply rooted, inherited, and systematically perpetuated by historical and contemporary power imbalances, creating persistent, structural barriers to equitable and sustainable development across the Global South.

II. The Relevance to Digital Governance and the WSIS+20 Agenda

The concept of institutional voids is profoundly relevant to discussions surrounding the WSIS+20 Zero Draft Outcome Document, particularly concerning digital governance and development in the Global South, including Africa. The challenges identified in the Zero Draft—such as unequal control over data, escalating cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and prohibitively high connectivity costs—are not isolated issues; they are direct manifestations of

the institutional voids analyzed by Mamun. These systemic gaps actively undermine efforts towards achieving sustainable growth in the digital era.

For instance, within BOP markets, institutional voids often amplify dependence on powerful foreign technology giants, leading to what can be described as **neocolonial data patterns**. This dependence compromises national data sovereignty, limits the potential for local digital innovation, and concentrates control in the hands of a few external actors—precisely the issues the WSIS+20 Zero Draft seeks to mitigate through stronger international commitments to equitable data governance, the promotion of digital sovereignty, and targeted capacity building (Mamun, 2025).

Prahalad's BOP theory offers a complementary perspective, suggesting that market-driven, targeted innovations in digital technologies—such as mobile finance and affordable internet access—can profitably serve these underserved markets. However, the successful and ethical deployment of such innovations is conditional: institutional voids must be intentionally and effectively bridged to ensure fair access, protect consumer rights, and enforce ethical business practices (Prahalad, 2004). Mamun's research underscores how voids in institutional frameworks—like weak regulatory bodies or insufficient legal protections—contribute to fragmented, insecure, and non-resilient digital infrastructures. This institutional weakness makes African nations particularly vulnerable to significant human rights and security risks, such as state-mandated internet shutdowns or surveillance overreach, issues central to the human rights and security focus of the WSIS+20 draft.

III. Bridging Voids: Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Ethical Technology Deployment

Beyond being a source of challenges, institutional voids also intersect with significant opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship, and alternative finance models in the digital realm. Mamun strongly argues that emerging and mature technologies, particularly **blockchain and Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, possess a unique potential to act as powerful institutional remedies. These technologies can enhance transparency, significantly reduce fraud, and improve efficiency where traditional institutions have failed (Mamun, 2021; Mamun, 2025).

Practical examples abound:

- **Blockchain's potential** to create immutable, transparent, and distributed ledgers can drastically slash fraud and increase security in crucial sectors like land registries, identity management, and supply chain tracking.
- **AI's application** can significantly boost agricultural productivity in African nations through better predictive analytics, personalized extension services, and optimized resource allocation.

Prahalad's framework reinforces this focus on innovation by advocating for business models that move beyond transactional selling to actively **co-create value** with BOP consumers and local communities. This approach turns institutional challenges—like a lack of formal credit or reliable infrastructure—into opportunities for developing scalable, sustainable ventures that are intrinsically aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Prahalad and Hammond, 2002).

In the context of the WSIS+20 framework, the focused, strategic effort to address these institutional voids—particularly through the development and implementation of Africa-centric, ethical governance models and robust technology transfer programs—holds the key to unlocking true digital transformation. This approach could effectively convert the current digital divides into powerful drivers of inclusive and sustainable growth. Such a strategy aligns perfectly with Prahalad's vision of profitable poverty alleviation through market solutions and resonates deeply with Mamun's urgent call for the ethical, localized deployment of digital tools to foster genuinely sustainable development in BOP markets and counter persistent geopolitical and socioeconomic imbalances.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Legacy Issues in Institutional Voids</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
<u>Algeria</u> (North Africa)	Limited broadband penetration in rural areas; high costs of internet access; regulatory barriers to digital innovation; gender disparities in digital skills; emerging AI risks without national frameworks.	Advocate for affordable connectivity subsidies; promote regional North African cooperation on data sovereignty; enhance multistakeholder engagement for ethical AI adoption; align with AU strategies for digital literacy and gender inclusion.
<u>Angola</u> (Southern Africa)	Infrastructure deficits due to post-conflict recovery; low internet penetration (around 30%); power outages affecting digital services;	Push for international funding for resilient infrastructure; focus on digital skills training for youth entrepreneurship; strengthen human rights

<u>Country</u>	<u>Legacy Issues in Institutional Voids</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
	youth unemployment linked to skills gaps; surveillance concerns in governance.	protections in digital laws; integrate WSIS with Agenda 2063 for sustainable development.
<u>Benin</u> (West Africa)	Urban-rural digital divide; high mobile data costs; limited e-government services; cyber threats to financial systems; low female participation in ICT sectors.	Host regional reviews like Cotonou Declaration to unify West African positions; seek technology transfer for e-services; prioritize gender equality in digital access; address affordability through GDC partnerships.
<u>Botswana</u> (Southern Africa)	Uneven access in remote areas; dependency on imported tech; data privacy gaps; emerging tech adoption without oversight; economic reliance on mining limiting digital diversification.	Promote innovation hubs for local tech development; advocate for data sovereignty policies; enhance multistakeholder forums for AI governance; bridge divides via affordable broadband initiatives.
<u>Burkina Faso</u> (West Africa)	Frequent internet shutdowns during instability; low literacy rates hindering digital use; infrastructure vulnerabilities; gender-based violence online; limited private sector involvement.	Call for moratorium on shutdowns and human rights safeguards; invest in digital literacy programs; foster regional cooperation for secure connectivity; prioritize inclusive innovation for SDGs.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Legacy Issues in Institutional Voids</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
<u>Cameroon</u> (Central Africa)	Bilingual digital content gaps; conflict-related disruptions to networks; high costs and low speeds; surveillance and censorship issues; youth exclusion from governance.	Advocate for conflict-resilient digital infrastructure; promote multilingual content development; strengthen civil society participation; focus on ethical tech use in fragile contexts.
<u>Chad</u> (Central Africa)	Extremely low internet penetration (<10%); refugee crises exacerbating divides; lack of skilled workforce; power and connectivity deficits; minimal digital economy.	Seek urgent international aid for basic connectivity; build capacity for digital skills in refugee communities; align WSIS with humanitarian tech applications; push for equitable resource allocation.
<u>Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)</u> (Central Africa)	Vast territorial divides with poor infrastructure; conflict zones without access; corruption in telecom licensing; low digital literacy; exploitation risks from foreign mining data centers.	Prioritize secure, sovereign data infrastructure; advocate for conflict-sensitive digital policies; enhance AU-led regional integration; focus on innovation for resource management.
<u>Egypt</u> (North Africa)	Urban concentration of digital services; surveillance laws restricting freedoms; gender gaps in STEM education; rapid urbanization straining	Reform digital laws for rights protections; promote women in tech entrepreneurship; seek funding for nationwide broadband; integrate WSIS

<u>Country</u>	<u>Legacy Issues in Institutional Voids</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
	networks; AI ethics in surveillance tech.	with national digital strategy for inclusion.
Ethiopia (East Africa)	Recent liberalization of telecom but high costs; rural-urban divide; government control over internet; ethnic conflicts disrupting access; low digital skills amid population growth.	Leverage telecom reforms for affordability; advocate against shutdowns; build digital infrastructure for agriculture; prioritize youth and gender inclusion in innovation ecosystems.
Ghana (West Africa)	Progress in mobile money but rural access gaps; data protection enforcement challenges; misinformation in elections; gender disparities in digital entrepreneurship; cyber fraud risks.	Strengthen multistakeholderism per national IGF; enhance data privacy laws; promote fintech innovation; address divides through universal service funds; align with GDC for ethical AI.
Kenya (East Africa)	Success in mobile innovation (e.g., M-Pesa) but affordability issues; surveillance via digital ID systems; urban bias in connectivity; youth cyberbullying; data sovereignty debates.	Lead East African positions on innovation; push for affordable data pricing; protect human rights in surveillance; foster startup ecosystems; integrate WSIS with Vision 2030.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Legacy Issues in Institutional Voids</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
<u>Lesotho</u> (Southern Africa)	Geographic isolation leading to high costs; low broadband coverage; dependency on South Africa for infrastructure; gender and disability inclusion gaps; limited local content.	Advocate for cross-border connectivity projects; promote digital literacy for SMEs; ensure equitable access in SIDS-like contexts; focus on sustainable green ICT.
<u>Liberia</u> (West Africa)	Post-Ebola recovery with weak infrastructure; low penetration rates; corruption in spectrum allocation; youth unemployment; online safety for children.	Seek post-conflict digital rebuilding aid; build resilient networks; prioritize child rights online; enhance multistakeholder participation for governance.
<u>Malawi</u> (Southern Africa)	Extreme poverty exacerbating divides; low electricity access affecting devices; agricultural sector needing digital tools; gender violence amplified online; skills shortages.	Focus on agritech innovation for inclusion; advocate for off-grid digital solutions; promote gender-sensitive policies; align WSIS with poverty reduction goals.
<u>Mali</u> (West Africa)	Instability causing shutdowns; desert regions with poor coverage; low literacy; jihadist threats to digital security; limited female digital participation.	Call for secure, resilient ICT in conflict zones; invest in local language content; strengthen regional Sahel cooperation; prioritize human rights and access.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Legacy Issues in Institutional Voids</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
Morocco (North Africa)	Progress in 5G but rural gaps; strict cyber laws on speech; youth migration due to job lacks; data localization vs. investment; AI in public services.	Advance digital economy strategy; balance security with freedoms; promote North-South tech partnerships; focus on youth entrepreneurship and gender equity.
Mozambique (Southern Africa)	Cyclone-prone infrastructure vulnerabilities; low penetration post-disasters; corruption in telecom; gender divides; limited e-health access.	Build climate-resilient digital systems; advocate for disaster-response tech; enhance gender inclusion; seek funding for connectivity recovery.
Namibia (Southern Africa)	Sparse population increasing costs; urban-rural disparities; data privacy in mining sector; indigenous communities' exclusion; emerging AI risks.	Promote indigenous digital inclusion; strengthen data sovereignty; foster green innovation; align with SADC regional digital agenda.
Nigeria (West Africa)	Massive population with urban overload; high cybercrime rates; gender and regional divides; shutdowns in conflicts; fintech boom but regulatory gaps.	Lead West African cyber capacity building; address affordability for masses; protect rights in digital economy; prioritize innovation hubs and youth skills.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Legacy Issues in Institutional Voids</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
Rwanda (East Africa)	Strong digital government but surveillance concerns; landlocked access challenges; gender progress but rural gaps; AI in smart city risks; dependency on imports.	Showcase e-gov models for WSIS; advocate for ethical surveillance; enhance regional East African bandwidth; focus on sustainable innovation.
Senegal (West Africa)	Progress in fiber optics but affordability; urban bias; French-language dominance; youth activism vs. censorship; climate impacts on infrastructure.	Promote multilingual digital content; strengthen civil society in governance; seek GDC funding for green ICT; address gender in entrepreneurship.
Somalia (East Africa)	Clan conflicts disrupting networks; piracy threats to undersea cables; low penetration; Al-Shabaab internet controls; refugee digital exclusion.	Prioritize secure infrastructure in fragile states; advocate for humanitarian digital access; build multistakeholder resilience; align with IGAD regional efforts.
South Africa (Southern Africa)	Inequality mirroring societal divides; load-shedding power issues; data privacy post-POPIA; racial/gender digital gaps; tech hub dominance in urban areas.	Lead Southern African positions on equity; enhance energy-resilient ICT; promote inclusive innovation; integrate WSIS with NDP for rights-based digital transformation.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Legacy Issues in Institutional Voids</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
Sudan (East/North Africa)	Civil war causing total shutdowns; humanitarian crises without digital aid; low baseline access; gender violence in displacement; fragmented governance.	Call for digital ceasefires and access in conflicts; support refugee connectivity; prioritize human rights; seek UN aid for rebuilding.
Tanzania (East Africa)	Rural connectivity gaps; regulatory hurdles for startups; misinformation regulations; gender disparities; Zanzibar-specific divides.	Advocate for balanced regulation; promote coastal digital hubs; enhance gender literacy; align with EAC for regional integration.
Uganda (East Africa)	Frequent shutdowns during protests; surveillance laws; youth exclusion; high costs for SMEs; HIV/AIDS data privacy issues.	Push for rights-respecting laws; foster youth-led innovation; address affordability; integrate WSIS with health SDGs.
Zambia (Southern Africa)	Power shortages affecting data centers; urban-rural divide; mining sector digital lags; gender gaps; limited multistakeholder input.	Build solar-powered ICT; promote mining tech innovation; enhance gender participation; seek SADC support for sovereignty.
Zimbabwe (Southern Africa)	Economic hyperinflation raising costs; government controls on internet; urban	Advocate for economic-stable digital policies; protect freedoms; foster local

<u>Country</u>	<u>Legacy Issues in Institutional Voids</u>	<u>Priorities for WSIS+20</u>
	blackouts; youth brain drain; corruption in digital projects.	entrepreneurship; align with AU for inclusive growth.

6.0 A Pan-African Perspective on the Zero Draft

6.1 Africa's Stance on the WSIS+20 Zero Draft: A Call for Equitable Digital Governance and Sovereign Development

African stakeholders have approached the Zero Draft of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)+20 Review with a mixture of cautious optimism and sharp critique, recognizing it as a foundational step toward more inclusive global digital governance, yet finding it critically lacking in substantive commitments vital for the Global South. The consensus emerging from regional forums, including the WSIS+20 Africa Regional Review and expert consultations with the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), emphasizes that the draft fails to adequately address foundational issues of digital equity, notably the high cost of access, the need for public financing mechanisms, and the critical importance of data sovereignty.

6.2 Prioritizing Access, Affordability, and Public Investment

While the draft is welcomed for its emphasis on fundamental human rights (paras 9-10) and the imperative of gender equality (para 13), African nations demand these principles be backed by concrete, actionable commitments. A central concern is the disproportionately high cost of connectivity. Data indicates that Africans spend, on average, 6.5% of their monthly income to purchase just 2GB of data—a figure approximately 14 times higher than what consumers in Europe pay for the same service. The continent advocates for mechanisms within the final document to mandate or support strategies that drastically reduce these connectivity costs, viewing affordable access as a prerequisite for full participation in the digital economy. Furthermore, there is a strong push to incorporate provisions for dedicated public financing and innovative funding models to bridge the significant investment gap in digital infrastructure across the continent, moving beyond reliance solely on private sector initiatives.

6.3 Advocacy for Digital Sovereignty and Geopolitical Balance

African positions, as articulated by influential nations like Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, and Morocco, strongly align with the broader demands of the Group of 77 (G77) and China. These countries are advocating for the unequivocal recognition of digital sovereignty, which encompasses the right of nations to govern data flows, regulate digital platforms, and control their domestic digital infrastructure without undue external influence. This emphasis is coupled with a call for mandatory technology transfer provisions to foster domestic innovation and reduce reliance on proprietary foreign technologies. Furthermore, African nations are seeking comprehensive reforms to international and domestic cybersecurity frameworks to explicitly combat and prevent government-mandated Internet shutdowns and surveillance, viewing these actions as direct violations of human rights and impediments to democratic processes.

6.4 Integrating Regional Strategies and Ethical Technology

African perspectives emphasize the need for the WSIS+20 outcome to be complementary to and supportive of existing regional strategies. Key regional frameworks, such as the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020-2030) and the Continental AI Strategy, are cited as essential blueprints. African stakeholders urge the Zero Draft to incorporate specific implementation mechanisms—including dedicated financial support packages, enhanced capacity building programs, and clear pathways for technology implementation—to ensure these regional strategies can be fully realized.

Moreover, as the world navigates the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies, African voices are insistent on integrating ethical safeguards into the global framework. The focus is on ensuring that the deployment and governance of these technologies are people-centred, prevent the deepening of existing inequalities, and specifically address the risks of bias and exclusion within the African context.

6.5 Transforming the WSIS+20 Process

Ultimately, the African vision seeks to transform the WSIS+20 review process from a mere procedural update into a platform for achieving genuinely equitable digital futures. This involves a fundamental shift in priorities toward people-centred innovation and a deliberate effort to counter the current geopolitical imbalances that concentrate data control and decision-making power in a few global hubs. Enhanced multi-stakeholder engagement, with a guaranteed and amplified voice for developing countries, is considered non-negotiable to shape outcomes that truly reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of the African continent.

6.6 Impact on Data Security

The Zero Draft of the WSIS+20 Review articulates a strong commitment to establishing a safe, secure, and trustworthy digital space (para 10), an objective that holds significant implications for data security across Africa. This commitment is intended to catalyze international cooperation on cybersecurity and proactive risk mitigation strategies, particularly against threats stemming from rapidly emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and quantum computing (para 15).

However, the realization of this vision is significantly complicated by persistent, deep-seated challenges at the regional level. Reports from African civil society and inter-governmental bodies frequently highlight the detrimental effects of **Internet shutdowns**, pervasive **online surveillance**, and the rise of **digital authoritarianism**. These practices erode user confidence and trust in digital systems, threatening to undermine the very foundation of the Zero Draft's goals if not addressed with concrete and enforceable policies.

In response, African nations are actively advocating for robust policy and technical solutions. A key priority is the development of **resilient digital public infrastructure (DPI)**—foundational platforms, secure by design and governed transparently—which can underpin secure service delivery. Furthermore, there is a strong push for comprehensive **reforms to national cybersecurity laws**. These reforms aim to harmonize with and operationalize the principles enshrined in the **African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention)**, which represents the continent's most ambitious legal framework for digital security.

The anticipated positive impacts of a strengthened, human rights-based approach to data security are substantial, including enhanced protection for **vulnerable groups**—such as human rights defenders, journalists, and marginalized communities—whose digital participation is often most at risk. Conversely, substantial **implementation gaps** remain a significant risk factor. A failure to translate international and regional commitments into effective national enforcement mechanisms leaves African digital ecosystems susceptible to exploitation. This vulnerability is often exploited by **foreign state and non-state actors** who may target weak systems for espionage, intellectual property theft, or political interference.

Ultimately, while strengthened data security policies promise a reduction in successful **data breaches** and the fostering of a safer, more predictable environment for broad **digital participation** and e-commerce, the current landscape is characterized by fragmentation. Disparate and uncoordinated national cybersecurity and data protection frameworks across the continent **exacerbate vulnerabilities**. Without robust, systematic **regional coordination**—both technical and regulatory—the aggregated risk across the continent remains high, potentially offsetting the benefits derived from global commitments like the WSIS+20 Review.

6.7 Impact on Data Sovereignty

Data sovereignty has emerged as a paramount concern for African nations, serving as a critical lens through which to evaluate the draft WSIS+20 outcome document. The draft's emphasis on inclusive governance (para 3) offers a strategic window for African states to proactively assert greater control over their national data resources, a necessity given the prevailing dominance of global technology corporations. This imperative is inextricably linked to the continent's broader socio-economic goals.

The document's explicit **recognition of development needs** (para 4) provides substantive backing for continental initiatives such as the African Union's (AU) Data Policy Framework. This framework, and its core principles, directly supports national calls for practical mechanisms like **data localization**—requiring data to be stored and processed within national borders—and the establishment of robust **interoperability standards** across different national and regional digital systems.

The potential positive **impacts** of asserting data sovereignty are significant and transformative. A primary benefit is a substantial **reduction in dependency on foreign data centers**. Currently, external entities control a disproportionate share—over 70%—of Africa's cloud and data market. Strategic, coordinated investments in local infrastructure, exemplified by the development of energy-efficient, **green data centers in Kenya**, represent a tangible step toward self-reliance, fostering local digital ecosystems and retaining economic value.

However, the pursuit of data sovereignty is not without its **complex challenges**, often referred to as the "**digital sovereignty trap**." Overly strict or protectionist data localization mandates, while aiming to secure national data, inadvertently risk **deterring foreign direct investment** in the critical ICT sector. Finding a balance is crucial: policies must protect national interests without creating an inhospitable climate for the international finance and expertise necessary for digital growth.

Eventually, a well-coordinated strategy involving **collective bargaining**—ideally spearheaded through the African Union—presents a potent avenue for managing these complexities. By negotiating as a unified bloc, African nations can secure significantly **better terms and agreements with global tech giants**. This collective approach can effectively enhance data sovereignty, protecting citizens' data rights and economic interests, while simultaneously ensuring the continent remains integrated with and competitive in the global digital trade system. The failure to adopt such a strategic, unified response risks merely reinforcing historical patterns of dependence and **neocolonial data exploitation**, where the economic and strategic value of African data is primarily accrued by external actors.

6.8 Impact on Innovation

The Zero Draft's proposed outcomes, particularly its emphasis on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in paragraph 8 and the strategic embrace of emerging technologies in paragraph 15, represent a significant opportunity to accelerate digital innovation and transformation across the African continent, directly supporting the aspirations outlined in the African Union's Agenda 2063: "The Africa We Want."

6.8.1 Catalyzing Innovation through Technology Transfer and AI Adoption:

A core benefit for Africa is the potential to facilitate enhanced technology transfer mechanisms and promote the responsible adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This alignment is critical for fostering knowledge-based economies. African voices in the WSIS+20 discourse consistently advocate for leveraging this review process to secure continent-specific innovation priorities. A key example is the strategic focus on applying AI in vital sectors such as climate-resilient agriculture (precision farming, yield prediction) and public health (disease surveillance, remote diagnostics), as articulated in the Continental AI Strategy for Africa. Such focused application can lead to contextually relevant and scalable solutions.

6.8.2 Bridging the Digital Divide and Enhancing Digital Inclusion:

The outcomes, specifically the focus on affordable access and skills development (para 12), are essential tools for bridging the persistent digital divide. By prioritizing universal, affordable, and meaningful connectivity, WSIS+20 can unlock the potential for millions of Africans to participate in the digital economy. Furthermore, targeted skills development programs—covering everything from basic digital literacy to advanced AI and coding—will empower local populations to not only consume but also develop digital solutions. This enablement is crucial for fostering local, bottom-up solutions to complex challenges, including the impacts of climate change, resource scarcity, and economic volatility.

6.8.3 Opportunities for Ethical and Inclusive Innovation:

The opportunity set for Africa is not merely about adoption but also about shaping the innovation landscape. There is a strong consensus on the need for ethical innovation frameworks, ensuring human oversight and accountability in the deployment of transformative technologies like AI. This approach aims to maximize societal benefit while mitigating potential harms.

6.8.4 Mitigating Risks and Addressing Inequalities:

However, significant risks remain, primarily stemming from the potential for uneven adoption of new technologies and digital infrastructure. Without deliberate, inclusive policies, this unevenness could exacerbate existing socio-economic inequalities, creating a deeper divide between digitally connected urban centers and underserved rural areas. Furthermore, the global

competition for digital talent and resources poses a challenge to African nations seeking to build sovereign digital capacity.

6.8.5 Toward a Coordinated Global Strategy for Africa's Digital Future:

To realize the full promise of the WSIS+20 outcomes, coordinated and multi-stakeholder strategies are paramount. This involves stronger public-private partnerships, enhanced South-South cooperation, and greater institutional support from international bodies. By championing a unified and proactive stance, Africa can significantly boost its influence in the global discourse on digital governance and technology standards. Ultimately, turning strategic focus on innovation and inclusion into a primary driver for achieving the continent's sustainable development goals is the central task ahead.

6.9 Impact on Entrepreneurship

6.9.1 Enhancing African Entrepreneurship Through the WSIS 25 Framework

The proposed WSIS 25 draft provides a robust foundation for stimulating entrepreneurship across Africa, primarily through its explicit emphasis on achieving **economic growth** and fostering **multi-stakeholder partnerships** (as noted in paragraph 3). This strategic focus is poised to unlock the continent's potential by accelerating the development of critical startup ecosystems, particularly in high-growth sectors such as **fintech**, **agritech**, and **e-commerce**.

6.9.2 Key African Perspectives and Enabling Environments:

African stakeholders consistently stress that realizing this entrepreneurial potential requires the proactive establishment of comprehensive enabling environments. These environments must encompass:

1. Legal and Regulatory Stability: A predictable and transparent legal framework is essential to build investor confidence and protect intellectual property rights for innovative, youth-led ventures.
2. Investment in Digital Infrastructure: Significant public and private capital must be directed toward expanding reliable and affordable digital infrastructure, including fiber optic networks and 5G deployment, especially in rural and underserved areas.

6.9.3 Anticipated Impacts and Existing Models:

If these supportive measures are effectively implemented, the impacts could be transformative. The primary benefits include substantial **job creation** and the promotion of genuinely **inclusive economic growth**. Success stories, such as **Kenya's vibrant tech hubs** (e.g., Silicon Savannah),

serve as powerful models, demonstrating how a concentrated focus on technology and innovation can attract foreign direct investment and cultivate a skilled workforce.

6.9.4 Challenges and Threats to Progress:

Despite the optimistic outlook, several persistent challenges threaten to impede progress:

- High Data Costs: The exorbitant cost of mobile data and internet access across much of the continent acts as a significant barrier to entry for aspiring entrepreneurs and limits market reach.
- Digital Skills Gaps: A persistent mismatch between the skills taught in educational institutions and the demands of the digital economy creates a critical bottleneck for scaling tech ventures.

6.10 The Role of Gender and Inclusivity:

A vital component of the WSIS 25 draft is its explicit **gender focus** (highlighted in paragraph 13). This commitment has the potential to significantly **empower women entrepreneurs** by facilitating access to digital finance, mentorship, and market opportunities. Furthermore, by addressing the issue of **violence amplified by technology** (such as online harassment and gender-based abuse), the framework can contribute to creating safer and more equitable digital spaces for women in business.

6.11 The Risk of Exacerbating Divides:

A critical caveat remains: the potential for entrepreneurial success to be concentrated among a privileged few. Without dedicated public financing mechanisms, including grants, seed funding, and subsidized access to technology, entrepreneurship may be largely confined to urban elites. This scenario would not only fail to achieve inclusive growth but would also exacerbate existing digital and economic divides between urban centers and rural communities. Therefore, achieving the goals of the WSIS 25 framework hinges on balancing private sector dynamism with public sector intervention to ensure equity and access.

6.12 Impact on Finance

6.12.1 Financial Dimensions of the Zero Draft and Africa's Digital Agenda

The Zero Draft's call for mobilizing financial resources to bridge global digital divides (as articulated in paragraph 4) directly resonates with the long-standing demands of African nations for enhanced, concessional, and flexible funding mechanisms. Specifically, African countries

advocate for increased public investment alongside targeted private-sector engagement in critical connectivity infrastructure.

6.12.2 Mobilizing Capital and Market Potential:

The anticipated impact of this global commitment is substantial, potentially mobilizing billions of dollars into Africa's burgeoning digital ecosystem. This investment is crucial for financing the construction and scaling of vital infrastructure, including high-capacity data centers, fiber optic networks, and last-mile connectivity solutions. Projections indicate the significant growth trajectory of the African data center market, which is expected to reach approximately **\$9.15 billion by 2029**. The framework provided by the Global Digital Compact (GDC) is envisioned as a key facilitator for structured public-private partnerships to realize this potential.

6.12.3 Addressing Debt and Sovereignty:

Crucially, African stakeholders are pushing for innovative financial mechanisms, such as **debt-for-digital swap initiatives**, where debt relief is directly tied to commitments and investments in national digital transformation projects. Furthermore, the establishment of dedicated, regionally managed digital infrastructure funds is seen as a vital step to mitigate over-reliance on external, often conditional, development assistance. This approach aims to attract necessary Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) while simultaneously allowing African nations to assert greater **digital sovereignty** and control over their strategic digital assets.

6.13 Challenges and the Need for Coordinated Action:

Despite the positive momentum for attracting capital, significant intrinsic challenges could deter foreign investment. The most pressing among these are deep-seated infrastructure deficits, particularly in reliable power generation and clean water supply—resources essential for operating energy-intensive data centers and network hubs. Addressing these fundamental challenges requires parallel investment in the energy and utility sectors.

6.14 Strategic Coordination:

To maximize leverage and ensure that financial flows are genuinely supportive of equitable digital transformation, a unified and coordinated approach through the **African Union (AU)** is paramount. A cohesive AU strategy would significantly enhance the continent's bargaining power in negotiations with international financial institutions, development partners, and private sector investors, ensuring that funding priorities align with the goal of inclusive and sustainable digital development across the continent.

7.0 Way Forward: African Perspectives on the WSIS+20 Zero Draft: Catalyzing a Just Digital Future

7.1 A Critical Assessment from the African Continent

From the distinct vantage point of the African continent, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)+20 Zero Draft represents a crucial, albeit structurally incomplete, blueprint for actualizing a truly just, inclusive, and sustainable digital future. While acknowledging the document's foundational value in setting a global agenda, its successful and equitable application across Africa hinges on the integration of significantly stronger, more explicit, and actionable commitments that directly and pragmatically address continental realities concerning digital sovereignty, security, and the persistent challenge of the digital divide. The current draft, while aspirational, must be sharpened to prevent the new digital architecture from inadvertently perpetuating historical global inequalities and economic dependencies.

7.2 Key Imperatives for Enhanced Commitment and Action:

The following areas require substantial refinement and concrete pledges within the final WSIS+20 outcome document:

1. Digital Sovereignty and Robust Data Governance:

The Draft must move decisively beyond general principles of cooperation to incorporate concrete, legally-sound mechanisms that unequivocally safeguard African nations' jurisdictional control over their critical data infrastructure and digital policy formulation. This is fundamentally vital to prevent the perpetuation of colonial-era dependencies in the new digital sphere. The objective is to ensure that the vast amount of data generated within the continent—a resource as valuable as any mineral—serves its internal development priorities, economic growth, and societal welfare first and foremost. The necessity for true digital self-determination mandates robust, non-negotiable commitments to:

- **Localized Data Storage and Processing:** Prioritizing the development of regional and national data centres and cloud infrastructure to keep African data on African soil, thereby enhancing security and regulatory oversight.
- **Capacity Building:** Investing heavily in localized data science, data ethics, artificial intelligence (AI) governance, and digital policy expertise across government, academia, and industry.
- **Equitable Access to Intellectual Property (IP):** Establishing frameworks that ensure African innovators and institutions have fair and affordable access to essential digital IP and technologies, fostering local innovation rather than dependency on foreign monopolies.

2. Advanced Cybersecurity and Digital Resilience:

Given the rapidly escalating and sophisticated global threat landscape—which

disproportionately targets nascent digital economies—the document requires significantly stronger language, dedicated resources, and actionable strategies for bolstering comprehensive cybersecurity infrastructure across Africa. A secure digital environment is a prerequisite for trust and investment. Key actions must include:

- **Technical Assistance and Infrastructure Support:** Providing dedicated technical and financial assistance for the urgent establishment and professionalization of national and regional Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs) and Security Operations Centres (SOCs).
- **Cross-Border Cooperation Frameworks:** Fostering practical, real-time cross-border cooperation in tackling cybercrime, digital fraud, and the misuse of data, potentially through enhanced mandates for regional bodies like the African Union's Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL).
- **Security and Human Rights Balance:** Ensuring that all established security measures are strictly balanced with the fundamental protection of human rights, including freedom of expression, privacy, and due process, preventing security overreach from stifling digital freedom.

3. Inclusion and Systematically Bridging the Digital Divide:

While inclusion is a core tenet, the chronic and deep-seated digital divide prevalent in Africa demands that the Draft mandate specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) commitments. Vague pledges are insufficient. This requires a targeted, multi-faceted approach:

- **Affordable Broadband Expansion:** Dedicated focus and funding mechanisms to extend affordable, high-speed broadband connectivity—both terrestrial and satellite—to remote rural and currently underserved peri-urban areas, prioritizing the expansion of backbone infrastructure.
- **Device Access Subsidization:** Implementing national and international subsidy programs and public-private partnerships to make access devices (smartphones, tablets, and computers) universally affordable, addressing the "cost of the last mile" for end-users.
- **Widespread Digital Literacy and Skills Training:** Launching comprehensive, state-supported digital literacy and advanced skills training programs, with a dedicated, equity-focused approach targeting historically marginalized groups: women, youth, persons with disabilities, and low-income populations. These programs should move beyond basic literacy to encompass coding, data analytics, and digital entrepreneurship.

7.3 Profound Impact and Continental Opportunity:

The effective and robust implementation of an augmented WSIS+20 framework holds profound implications and opportunities for unlocking sustainable growth across Africa's key socio-economic sectors:

- **Data Economy and Local Innovation:** Granting stronger sovereign rights over data will act as a powerful engine for local innovation, significantly reducing the reliance on foreign data monopolies. This will create new, context-relevant opportunities for African entrepreneurs to develop digital services tailored to unique continental needs (e.g., in AgriTech, HealthTech, and EdTech). The framework must explicitly prioritize creating an enabling regulatory environment for nimble startups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- **Deepened Financial Inclusion:** Digital finance, especially the mobile money revolution, has been transformative for inclusion in Africa. The WSIS+20 commitments must actively support the secure, interoperable, and standardized expansion of digital financial services, ensuring they remain affordable, transparent, and accessible to the continent's large unbanked and underbanked populations.
- **Entrepreneurship and Scaled Job Creation:** By fostering a secure, sovereign, and profoundly inclusive digital ecosystem, the refined document can act as a critical catalyst for massive, high-value job creation in the tech and adjacent service sectors. This strategic shift is essential for rapidly transitioning African economies into dynamic, knowledge-based societies, providing meaningful employment for the continent's burgeoning youth population.

7.4 The Imperative for Resolute African Leadership:

The ultimate success and relevance of the WSIS+20 agenda on the continent hinge critically on African nations exercising collective, coordinated, and decisive leadership. Regional unity, powerfully channelled through institutional bodies like the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), is essential. This collective effort is required to ensure that common African positions are not only articulated but also vigorously advanced and entrenched on the global stage, leveraging the continent's demographic and economic weight.

7.5 A Decisive Call to Action:

Active, high-level, and expertly informed engagement in the October 2025 WSIS consultations and the subsequent lead-up to the final review is not merely an option but a strategic and geopolitical imperative. African delegates must vigorously push to refine and strengthen the Zero Draft, transforming it from a general consensus document into a powerful, binding instrument that genuinely catalyses sustainable, equitable continental development. The core goal is to ensure the emerging digital future does not simply replicate or worsen existing global power imbalances and economic inequalities but, instead, serves fundamentally as an engine for genuine empowerment, equitable growth, and holistic prosperity across Africa.

8.0 References

1. African Leadership Magazine (2025) Who Really Owns Your Data?: The Fight for Digital Sovereignty. Available at: <https://www.africanleadershipmagazine.co.uk/who-really-owns-your-data-the-fight-for-digital-sovereignty/> (Accessed: 17 September 2025).
2. European External Action Service (2025) EU non-papers on the 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20 review). European Union, Brussels. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-non-papers-20-year-review-world-summit-information-society-wsis20-review_en?s=63 (Accessed: 17 September 2025).
3. Global Network Initiative (2025) The opportunity for Africa to take a leadership role in the WSIS+20 review process. Available at: <https://globalnetworkinitiative.org/the-opportunity-for-africa-to-take-a-leadership-role-in-the-wsis20-review-process/> (Accessed: 17 September 2025).
4. Global Network Initiative and Global Partners Digital (2025) The Road to WSIS+20: Key Country Perspectives in the Twenty-Year Review of the World Summit on the Information Society. Global Network Initiative, Washington, DC. Available at: https://globalnetworkinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/GNI-GPD-Report_The-Road-to-WSIS20.pdf (Accessed: 17 September 2025).
5. Global Partners Digital (2025) The Road to WSIS+20: Key Country Perspectives in the Twenty-Year Review of the World Summit on the Information Society. Global Partners Digital, London. Available at: <https://www.gp-digital.org/publication/the-road-to-wsis20-key-country-perspectives-in-the-twenty-year-review-of-the-world-summit-on-the-information-society/> (Accessed: 17 September 2025).
6. Group of 77 (2025) Statement on the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Group of 77, New York. Available at: <https://www.g77.org/statement/getstatement.php?id=250214c> (Accessed: 17 September 2025).
7. International Telecommunication Union (2025) WSIS+20 High-Level Event 2025. Available at: <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2025/en> (Accessed: 17 September 2025).
8. Mamun, S.M. (2021) BLOCKCHAINS: Gaming and Collusion: A Reading in Political Economy. Independently published.
9. Mamun, S.M. (2025) Institutional Voids in Bottom-of-the-Pyramid Markets: Institutional Voids, Financial Costs, and the Transformative Roles of Blockchain and Artificial Intelligence. Available at: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/syed11muntasir_institutional-voids-in-bottom-of-the-pyramid-activity-7381695449147084800-LHKb (Accessed: 18 October 2025).

10. New America (2025) Africa's Digital Sovereignty Trap: Breaking the Data Center Development Deadlock. Available at:
<http://newamerica.org/planetary-politics/briefs/africas-digital-sovereignty-trap/>
(Accessed: 17 September 2025).
11. Prahalad, C.K. and Hammond, A. (2002) Serving the World's Poor, Profitably. Harvard Business Review, 80(9), pp. 48-57.
12. Prahalad, C.K. (2004) The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid: Eradicating Poverty Through Profits. Wharton School Publishing.
13. United Nations (2025) Zero Draft of the outcome document for the review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20 Review). United Nations General Assembly, New York.
14. United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (2025) CSTD consultation in the African Region on WSIS at 20: Successes, failures and future expectations. Available at:
<https://unctad.org/meeting/cstd-consultation-african-region-wsis-20-successes-failures-and-future-expectations> (Accessed: 17 September 2025).
15. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2025) World Summit on the Information Society in Africa (WSIS+20) 2025 Annual Review. UNECA, Addis Ababa. Available at: <http://www.uneca.org/eca-events/africa-wsis-annual-review-2025>
(Accessed: 17 September 2025).