Africa Regional Review Meeting on Africa's Contributions towards Global Digital Compact

04th – 05th July 2023

Cape Town – South Africa

Background

The United Nations recognizes the transformative power of digital technologies and the need for international cooperation to harness their benefits while addressing their risks. In response to the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, a Declaration was adopted, highlighting the importance of digital cooperation and the need to shape a shared vision for a secure and beneficial digital future. As part of this, the Secretary-General's report proposes the establishment of a Global Digital Compact, outlining principles for an open, free, and secure digital environment.

Rwanda and Sweden have been appointed as Co-facilitators to lead the intergovernmental process on the Global Digital Compact. As part of the consultative process, the United Nations seeks input from individuals, organizations, and entities worldwide on what they want to see in the Compact. The goal is to gather diverse perspectives and shape a comprehensive agreement that addresses issues such as connecting the unconnected, avoiding Internet fragmentation, protecting privacy rights, ensuring human rights online, countering discrimination and misleading content, and regulating artificial intelligence.

To facilitate this process, an online platform has been established where stakeholders can submit their inputs, share views, and access relevant resources. The collected input will inform the deliberations of the Global Digital Compact, which is scheduled to take place in 2024 as part of the Summit of the Future.

The United Nations emphasizes the importance of an open, free, and secure digital future for all. The Global Digital Compact aims to establish shared principles and regulations to guide digital development and promote trust, inclusivity, and sustainability. By actively engaging in the consultative process and providing input,

stakeholders can contribute to shaping the Compact and influencing the international community's actions in addressing digital challenges and opportunities.

Overall, the Global Digital Compact seeks to ensure that digital technologies are harnessed for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals while mitigating their negative impacts. It recognizes the pivotal role of international cooperation in shaping a digital future that benefits everyone, fosters innovation, protects human rights, and promotes global values.

The Digital Centre of Excellence of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) aims to bring together government institutions representatives, policymakers, academicians, private sector and civil society organisations to propose and review African contribution to the Global Digital Compact. The Global Digital Compact is an opportunity for Africa to contribute to the development of a more inclusive and equitable digital future.

Objective

The African continent has immense potential to shape the future of the global digital landscape. With a fast-growing population, a vibrant entrepreneurial spirit, and increasing connectivity, Africa can make a significant contribution to the Global Digital Compact. Africa has the potential to be a major player in the global digital economy. However, Africa also faces significant challenges in terms of digital access, skills, and infrastructure.

Specifically, African contribution to the global digital compact will be geared to address the following:

- Ensuring universal access to the internet

- Protecting people's privacy and cybersecurity

- Protecting human rights online and eliminating cyber based violence

- Fostering digital skills, including basic, intermediate, and advanced digital skills

- Promoting digital inclusion and addressing the digital divide, especially on gender and rural-urban digital divide

- Promoting the responsible use of emerging technologies for social and economic development, such as artificial intelligence, blockchain technologies, and IoT

Expected Outcomes

It is expected that stakeholders will propose and review African contributions to the Global Digital Compact. Then the secretariat led by UNECA will develop the document which will be approved by stakeholders to be submitted as African contribution to the global digital compact. The document is expected to cover the following areas:

- **Infrastructure Development**: Africa recognizes the need for robust digital infrastructure to support the growing demand for connectivity. The African Contribution to the Global Digital Compact will focus on enhancing and expanding broadband connectivity, particularly in remote and underserved areas. This will involve promoting public-private partnerships, attracting investments, and leveraging innovative technologies to bridge the digital divide.

- **Digital Skills and Education:** To fully harness the digital opportunities, Africa will prioritize investing in digital skills development and education. The African Contribution will emphasize initiatives that promote digital literacy, coding, entrepreneurship, and vocational training. Partnerships with international organizations, governments, academia, and private sector entities will be fostered to provide quality digital education and training programs across the continent.

- **Digital Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Africa has a thriving startup ecosystem that can contribute significantly to the global digital landscape. The African Contribution will support the growth of digital entrepreneurship and innovation by providing access to financing, mentorship, and incubation programs. Efforts will be made to create an enabling environment that encourages innovation, protects intellectual property rights, and fosters cross-border collaboration among African startups and with global partners.

- **Digital Inclusion and Gender Equality:** Africa recognizes the importance of digital inclusion and ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital revolution. The African Contribution will focus on bridging the digital gender gap and promoting inclusivity for marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities and rural communities. Policies and initiatives will be developed to promote affordable access, relevant content, and digital services that cater to diverse needs.

- **Data Governance and Privacy:** Africa acknowledges the significance of data governance, privacy, and cybersecurity in the digital age. The African Contribution will prioritize the development of robust legal frameworks, data protection regulations, and cybersecurity measures. Collaborative efforts will be undertaken to enhance cross-border data flow, while ensuring data sovereignty, privacy, and protection.

Date

The Africa Regional Review Meeting on Africa's Contributions towards Global Digital Compact will be held **20th – 21st June 2023 in Capetown, South Africa**.

Proposed Participants

This regional review meeting targets key stakeholders involved in   fostering the digital ecosystem, in particular policy makers, development partners, academia, private sector and civil societies.

Depending on the focused topic to be further refined, the following list of institutions would be ideal candidates for the workshop:

- Ministries of communication, innovation and digital economy and education
- Communication Regulator Authorities, Data Protection Commissions and other commissions and authorities working in the digital economy ecosystem of respective member States.
- Private sector in the digital economy, such as Telecommunication Companies, FinTech and EdTech.
- Key regional institutions and partners such as the African Union, Smart Africa, and ITU
- Academic and regional research institutions including, Universities, Research ICT for Africa (RIA) and African Advanced Level Telecommunications Institute (AFRALTI).
- Bilateral and multilateral institutions engaged in the digital economy, such as Mastercard Foundation, GIZ, World Bank, and USAID.
- Civic society and non-profit organizations, such as Internet Society, Lawyers Hub and CIPESA

Conclusion

The African Contribution to the Global Digital Compact aims to position Africa as a key player in the global digital ecosystem. By focusing on infrastructure development, digital skills and education, digital entrepreneurship and innovation, digital inclusion, and data governance, Africa can actively contribute to the achievement of the Compact's objectives. Through partnerships and collaboration, Africa seeks to create a thriving digital economy that fosters sustainable development, empowers its people, and contributes meaningful connectivity.