

Comparative Analysis:

The WSIS+20 Final Outcome Document
in Light of AIFAT Propositions



AIFAT Staff Papers

AIFAT (AI for Africa Thinktank)
Secretariat

December 23, 2025



Introduction

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)+20, culminating in the adoption of the outcome document by the United Nations General Assembly on December 16-17, 2025, represents a pivotal moment in global digital governance. Building on the foundational principles established in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005), the final document reaffirms a commitment to a people-centered, inclusive, and development-oriented information society. It addresses persistent digital divides, emphasizes multi-stakeholder cooperation, and integrates synergies with recent frameworks like the Global Digital Compact (GDC) adopted in September 2024 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, from the perspective of the Global South, particularly Africa, the document's efficacy is measured against the ambitious, evidence-based propositions advanced by the AI for Africa Taskforce (AIFAT).

AIFAT, through documents such as the "Proposal for an Equitable Digital Future" (Mamun, Umegboli, & Matin, 2025) and subsequent appraisals of negotiation drafts, articulates a Pan-African diplomatic position structured around five core pillars: (1) Connectivity and Affordability, (2) Digital Sovereignty, Data Governance, and Security, (3) Protecting Human Rights and Digital Freedoms, (4) Finance and Investment, and (5) Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Innovation. These pillars draw from Pan-African priorities like actionable targets, sovereign controls, integration with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and bottom-of-the-pyramid (BoP) triangulation, while incorporating Global South perspectives from the Group of 77 (G77) and BRICS declarations (e.g., Brazil's 2025 positions emphasizing multipolar AI and South-South cooperation). AIFAT's reasoning underscores the need to move beyond aspirational language to enforceable, financially backed mechanisms that mitigate technological dependency, close funding gaps, and ensure equitable outcomes aligned with Agenda 2063 and the GDC.

This essay comprehensively evaluates how the WSIS+20 final outcome document fares against these AIFAT propositions. It highlights alignments where the document echoes AIFAT's calls for inclusion and multi-stakeholderism, shortfalls in specificity and enforceability, and occasional exceedances where it advances broader commitments. Overall, the final document demonstrates partial progress toward an equitable digital future but falls short of AIFAT's transformative vision, often due to compromises that favor voluntary measures over binding obligations - reflecting tensions between Global North and South positions in negotiations.

Pillar I: Connectivity and Affordability

AIFAT's first pillar demands concrete, measurable targets to dismantle economic barriers to digital inclusion, such as adopting a 2% GNI per capita affordability benchmark for 2GB of mobile data by 2030, inspired by ITU standards (ITU, 2022). It advocates for blended finance to expand resilient infrastructure, community networks for rural-urban equity, and AI-optimized supply chains to support marginalized groups like smallholder farmers. This reasoning stems from Africa's persistent affordability gap, where high data costs render connectivity a luxury, exacerbating divides and hindering AfCFTA integration (Mamun et al., 2025). AIFAT appraisals of earlier drafts (e.g., Rev1 and Rev2) noted shortfalls in specificity, urging G77 alliances to counter Western dilutions.

The WSIS+20 final document aligns moderately with this pillar, reaffirming the need for universal, meaningful, and affordable connectivity as essential to bridging digital divides (Paragraphs 9, 25). It recognizes tremendous growth in connectivity since 2005 but highlights barriers in developing countries, including infrastructure gaps and affordability issues (Paragraphs 5, 6, 8). Commitments to investment in networks, devices, and content (Paragraph 3), incentives for the unconnected via universal access funds and community networks (Paragraph 25), and triangular cooperation to improve quality and affordability (Paragraph 26) echo AIFAT's calls for public-private partnerships and resilient solutions. Synergies with the GDC's 2030 broadband goals and BRICS' emphasis on inclusive infrastructure (BRICS, 2025b) are implicit, as the document promotes digital solutions for commerce and remote areas (Paragraph 36).

However, significant shortfalls persist. The document lacks AIFAT's explicit 2% GNI target, offering only general calls for affordability without time-bound metrics or enforcement mechanisms—mirroring Rev2's compromises where G77 proposals for mandatory reforms were softened. Africa-centric elements, such as AfCFTA-linked rural networks or BoP-focused AI analytics, are absent, reducing the document's relevance to Pan-African contexts. While it exceeds AIFAT in addressing environmental impacts of digital growth (Paragraph 41) and school connectivity by 2030 (Paragraph 36), these are broad and do not fully compensate for the lack of sovereign, targeted financing. Overall, the document fares adequately in principle but inadequately in actionability, perpetuating the affordability barriers AIFAT seeks to dismantle.

Pillar II: Digital Sovereignty, Data Governance, and Security

AIFAT emphasizes sovereign data governance to mitigate dependency, leveraging models like South Africa's POPIA for capacity building and local value capture from data flows (Policy, 2024). It calls for explicit "digital sovereignty" language, protections against vendor lock-in, and human-centered security frameworks, including AI safeguards and environmental sustainability in ICTs. This line of reasoning critiques technological imperialism, advocating G77-BRICS alliances for multipolar governance and GDC

synergies to avoid duplication (Mamun et al., 2025). Appraisals highlighted shortfalls in Rev1/Rev2, where Western brackets opposed sovereignty terms.

The final WSIS document partially aligns, reaffirming the sovereign equality of states (Paragraph 4) and the need for equitable participation in digital governance, particularly for developing countries facing technical constraints (Paragraph 5). It emphasizes building confidence and security in ICTs (Paragraphs 14, 54-57), noting the open-ended working group on ICT security and calls for international cooperation to protect infrastructure from malicious activities and physical risks. Data governance is addressed through interoperable frameworks (Paragraph 82) and ethical AI development (Paragraphs 81-83), with commitments to capacity-building and bias mitigation—resonating with AIFAT's human oversight demands and GDC's inclusive AI principles.

Shortfalls are notable, however. "Digital sovereignty" is not explicitly mentioned, and there are no references to POPIA-like models or strong protections against dependency, reflecting negotiation compromises where EU/US/JPN resisted intergovernmental roles (as in Rev2). While it exceeds in proposing a Global Mechanism for ICT security (Paragraph 55) and UN-centered approaches, these lack AIFAT's Africa-centric focus on BoP security or AfCFTA integration. Environmental sustainability in ICTs (Paragraph 41) aligns but is not tied to sovereignty as AIFAT proposes. The document fares better than earlier drafts in security breadth but inadequately in sovereignty depth, risking continued Global South vulnerabilities.

Pillar III: Protecting Human Rights and Digital Freedoms

AIFAT's third pillar demands an end to arbitrary internet shutdowns and censorship, lifecycle safeguards for human rights, and explicit protections for vulnerable groups (e.g., women, youth, minorities). It calls for enforceable commitments against violence amplification and integration of rights across WSIS Action Lines, drawing from GNI principles (Global Network Initiative, 2025). Reasoning emphasizes that digital restrictions threaten economic stability and humanitarian efforts, urging G77 advocacy for "right to development" and BRICS ethical AI (Mamun et al., 2025). Appraisals noted strong alignments in Rev2 but shortfalls in enforcement.

The final document strongly aligns, centering human rights in the WSIS vision (Paragraphs 68-75), reaffirming the Universal Declaration and international law. It commits to respecting rights online/offline, including freedom of expression and privacy (Paragraph 29), and calls on businesses to uphold the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (Paragraph 74). Protections against shutdowns (Paragraph 75), misinformation, and violence (Paragraphs 56, 69) mirror AIFAT's demands, with integration into Action Lines (Paragraph 112) and safeguards for vulnerable groups like children, women, and Indigenous peoples (Paragraphs 77-79). Synergies with GDC's due diligence and BRICS' protections for minorities exceed in scope, adding media independence (Paragraph 76).

Shortfalls include the absence of prescriptive enforcement or Africa-specific redress, with language remaining aspirational—echoing Rev2 compromises on G77's "right to development." While it fares well in comprehensive rights coverage, it lacks AIFAT's mandatory mechanisms, potentially limiting impact on digital freedoms in restrictive contexts.

Pillar IV: Finance and Investment

AIFAT demands innovative financing to close Africa's \$3 billion annual ICT gap, including blended models, debt-linked instruments, and "Dual Core Finance" for MSMEs (AIFAT, 2025). It calls for task forces and climate-resilient investments, reasoning that traditional loans perpetuate dependency, advocating G77 reforms and BRICS NDB expansions for sustainable funding (Mamun et al., 2025).

The document aligns with calls for sustained investment in infrastructure and services (Paragraphs 62-67), promoting public-private partnerships and enabling environments (Paragraph 63). It welcomes the Sevilla Commitment from the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (Paragraph 1) and emphasizes private sector roles (Paragraph 64), synergizing with GDC's mobilization and BRICS' innovative instruments.

Shortfalls are evident: No explicit debt-linked mechanisms or "Dual Core Finance," with commitments favoring voluntary cooperation over binding reforms—reflecting negotiation dilutions. It exceeds in proposing international e-strategies and financing coordination (Paragraph 66) but lacks AIFAT's Africa-specific gap closures. The document fares moderately, advancing broad financing but inadequately addressing dependency.

Pillar V: Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Innovation

AIFAT proposes Africa-centric, interoperable DPI to accelerate AfCFTA, youth/women entrepreneurship, and innovation, with AI linkages and local content (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). Reasoning focuses on unlocking BoP potential through sovereign models and GDC synergies.

The final document aligns, recognizing DPI as a driver of transformation (Paragraph 17) and supporting interoperability (Paragraph 62). It promotes innovation capacity (Paragraphs 48-50) and ties DPI to skills for youth/women (Paragraph 32), with AI fellowships (Paragraph 85).

Shortfalls include no AfCFTA integration or sovereign safeguards, with general language lacking enforcement. It exceeds in global metrics (Paragraph 20) and open-

source synergies with GDC. Overall, it fares well in innovation breadth but short in Africa-specific depth.

Conclusion

The WSIS+20 final outcome document fares reasonably in aligning with AIFAT's high-level principles, particularly in connectivity, human rights, and DPI, where it incorporates GDC synergies and multi-stakeholder commitments. However, it falls short in specificity, enforceability, and sovereignty, often due to compromises that dilute G77 demands and favor voluntary measures—perpetuating shortfalls noted in AIFAT's Rev1/Rev2 appraisals. Exceedances in security and environmental aspects offer added value, but the document's general tone risks insufficient transformation for Africa. To bridge this, African nations should leverage G77-BRICS alliances for post-WSIS implementation, establishing taskforces for monitoring and advocating debt-linked reforms. Ultimately, while a step forward, the document requires stronger follow-up to realize AIFAT's equitable vision.