

# POST-WSIS+20 Review

Assessing the Adopted Outcome  
Document Against AIFAT Propositions



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## Introduction

The adoption of the WSIS+20 Outcome Document by the United Nations General Assembly on 16-17 December 2025 marks a significant milestone in the evolution of global digital governance, building upon the foundational visions articulated in the Geneva Declaration of Principles (2003) and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (2005). This document, formally titled *Outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society* (United Nations General Assembly, 2025), reaffirms commitments to a people-centred, inclusive, and development-oriented information society while integrating synergies with contemporary frameworks such as the Global Digital Compact (GDC) adopted in September 2024 (United Nations, 2024) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). As of March 2026, this post-adoption phase allows for a reflective assessment of the document's practical implications, particularly from the perspective of the Global South and Africa.

The AI for Africa Thinktank (AIFAT) has consistently advocated for transformative reforms through its pre-negotiation position papers, such as the *Proposal for an Equitable Digital Future* (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025a) and appraisals of draft revisions (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025b; Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025c). Structured around five pillars - Connectivity and Affordability; Digital Sovereignty, Data Governance, and Security; Protecting Human Rights and Digital Freedoms; Finance and Investment; and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Innovation - AIFAT's propositions emphasize enforceable, Africa-centric mechanisms to address structural inequalities, foster sovereign controls, and align with Pan-African initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2013). These draw on Global South alliances, including G77 priorities for equitable access and technology transfer, and BRICS declarations on multipolar AI governance (BRICS, 2025a; BRICS, 2025b).

This review evaluates the WSIS+20 Outcome Document's performance against AIFAT's framework in a post-adoption context, exploring alignments where it advances inclusive principles, shortfalls in enforceability and specificity, and exceedances in broader commitments like environmental sustainability. It considers nuances such as negotiation dynamics - where Western positions (e.g., from Japan and the EU) often diluted G77 demands - and implications for implementation, including edge cases like conflict-affected regions. While the document represents incremental progress, it largely perpetuates aspirational rhetoric over binding actions, underscoring the need

for African diplomacy to prioritise follow-up mechanisms like the proposed joint implementation road map (United Nations General Assembly, 2025, para. 122).

### **Pillar I: Connectivity and Affordability**

AIFAT's propositions under this pillar advocate for actionable targets, such as a 2% Gross National Income (GNI) per capita affordability threshold for 2GB of mobile data by 2030, drawing from ITU benchmarks (ITU, 2022). They emphasise resilient infrastructure through blended finance, community networks, and AI-optimised solutions to bridge rural-urban divides, integrating with AfCFTA to empower BoP populations like smallholder farmers (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025a). Post-adoption, AIFAT critiques highlight the necessity for monitoring mechanisms to ensure these targets translate into measurable outcomes, addressing edge cases where high data costs exacerbate inequalities in landlocked or conflict-prone African states (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025b).

The WSIS+20 Outcome Document aligns substantially with this pillar in principle, committing to universal, meaningful, and affordable connectivity as foundational to the Summit's vision (United Nations General Assembly, 2025, paras. 9, 19-27). It acknowledges persistent divides, citing ITU data on disparities between high-income (94% Internet use) and low-income countries (23%), as well as urban-rural (85% vs. 58%) and gender gaps (71% women vs. 77% men) (paras. 20-22). Calls for international cooperation, including blended finance and universal service funds, echo AIFAT's demands (para. 26), while emphasising multilingual content and public access facilities (paras. 27-28). Exceedances include commitments to school connectivity by 2030 (para. 37) and environmental considerations in infrastructure (para. 47), which extend beyond AIFAT's core focus to address climate vulnerabilities in Africa.

However, shortfalls are evident in the lack of binding metrics; the document opts for general aspirations like "accessible and affordable" broadband without AIFAT's 2% GNI target or time-bound enforcement (para. 27). This reflects negotiation compromises, where G77 proposals for mandatory affordability reforms were softened, potentially limiting impact in high-cost African contexts (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025c). Implications include continued barriers for BoP markets, where affordability gaps hinder AfCFTA integration. Post-adoption, the document's call for a joint road map (para. 122) offers an opportunity for AIFAT-aligned monitoring, but without dedicated funding, edge cases like disaster-prone regions may remain underserved.

## **Pillar II: Digital Sovereignty, Data Governance, and Security**

AIFAT demands explicit recognition of digital sovereignty, including sovereign data governance models like South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) (South Africa, 2013), to counter vendor lock-in and technological dependency. It calls for human-centred security frameworks, AI safeguards, and GDC synergies to foster multipolar governance, with emphasis on BoP security and AfCFTA integration (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025a). Post-WSIS appraisals underscore the need for capacity-building to mitigate risks in fragile states (Mamun, 2025).

The Outcome Document partially aligns, reaffirming sovereign equality (United Nations General Assembly, 2025, para. 4) and barriers to developing countries' participation in digital governance (para. 5). It emphasises confidence-building in ICTs (paras. 54-58), noting the Open-Ended Working Group on ICT security and calling for international cooperation against malicious activities. Data governance is addressed through interoperable frameworks (para. 81) and a CSTD working group on data (para. 83), while AI sections promote ethical development with human oversight (paras. 84-87), resonating with AIFAT's calls and GDC principles.

Shortfalls persist in the absence of "digital sovereignty" terminology or POPIA-like specifics, reflecting dilutions from Western brackets in drafts (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025b). Security commitments lack Africa-centric elements, such as BoP protections or vendor lock-in safeguards, potentially exacerbating dependencies in resource-constrained environments. Exceedances include a Global Mechanism for ICT security (para. 56) and environmental ICT sustainability (para. 42), which address broader risks like climate impacts on infrastructure. Post-adoption implications involve vulnerabilities in conflict zones, where weak enforcement could hinder sovereign controls; AIFAT's reasoning suggests leveraging BRICS alliances for implementation (BRICS, 2025a).

## **Pillar III: Protecting Human Rights and Digital Freedoms**

This pillar urges enforceable prohibitions on arbitrary internet shutdowns, lifecycle human rights safeguards, and protections for vulnerable groups, integrating GNI principles (Global Network Initiative, 2025). AIFAT emphasizes the economic and humanitarian threats of digital restrictions, advocating G77 inclusion of the "right to development" and BRICS ethical AI (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025a). Post-WSIS, it highlights monitoring needs for compliance in authoritarian contexts (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025c).

The document strongly aligns, centering human rights throughout (United Nations General Assembly, 2025, paras. 68-80), reaffirming offline-online equivalence and referencing the Universal Declaration (para. 69). It commits to protections against shutdowns (para. 76), misinformation, and violence (paras. 57, 78), with business due diligence under UN Guiding Principles (para. 71). Vulnerabilities for women, children, and minorities are addressed (paras. 79-80), exceeding in media independence (para. 77) and GDC synergies.

Shortfalls include aspirational language without mandatory mechanisms or redress specifics, echoing Rev2 compromises on G77's "right to development" (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025b). Implications for Africa involve unaddressed shutdowns in electoral periods, potentially stifling freedoms. Post-adoption, the road map (para. 122) could enable AIFAT-driven oversight, but edge cases like refugee digital rights require stronger UN follow-up.

#### **Pillar IV: Finance and Investment**

AIFAT demands closing Africa's \$3 billion ICT funding gap through innovative models like blended finance, debt-linked instruments, and "Dual Core Finance" for MSMEs (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025a). It advocates task forces and climate-resilient investments, critiquing dependency from traditional loans and urging G77-BRICS reforms (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025b).

The document aligns with calls for sustained investment (United Nations General Assembly, 2025, paras. 62-67), promoting public-private partnerships and referencing the Sevilla Commitment (para. 65). It urges multilateral banks for innovative mechanisms (para. 26) and an ITU-led task force on financing gaps (para. 67), synergizing with GDC.

Shortfalls omit debt-linked specifics or "Dual Core Finance," favoring voluntary cooperation—reflecting dilutions (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025c). Exceedances include e-strategy financing (para. 66). Post-adoption, implications involve persistent gaps in low-income states; AIFAT suggests NDB expansions (BRICS, 2025b) for edge cases like post-conflict recovery.

#### **Pillar V: Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Innovation**

AIFAT proposes interoperable, Africa-centric DPI to boost AfCFTA, youth/women entrepreneurship, and innovation, with sovereign safeguards

(Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025a; Carnegie Endowment, 2025). Post-WSIS, it emphasises ethical AI and BoP focus (Mamun, 2025).

The document aligns, recognising DPI as transformative (United Nations General Assembly, 2025, para. 17) with interoperability (para. 82). Innovation capacity-building (paras. 48-53) and AI fellowships (para. 86) support youth/women (para. 11).

Shortfalls lack AfCFTA ties or sovereign models, with general commitments. Exceedances include open-source synergies (para. 17). Implications for BoP involve untapped potential; post-adoption road maps could integrate AIFAT's vision.

### **Future Expectations for the WSIS Forum 2026**

As the first major convening following the WSIS+20 review, the WSIS Forum 2026, scheduled for 6-10 July 2026 in Geneva, Switzerland, represents a critical juncture for translating the Outcome Document's commitments into actionable progress (ITU, 2026a). Organised by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in collaboration with UNESCO, UNDP, and UNCTAD, this hybrid event—allowing both in-person and remote participation—aims to accelerate digital cooperation and implementation of the WSIS Action Lines, with a particular emphasis on the GDC and 2030 Agenda synergies (ITU, 2026b). Expectations are high for the Forum to address lingering shortfalls in the WSIS+20 document, such as the lack of enforceable metrics and Africa-centric mechanisms, by fostering multi-stakeholder dialogues that prioritise Global South perspectives, including those from AIFAT (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025a).

From multiple angles, the Forum is anticipated to explore emerging nuances in digital governance, such as the integration of AI ethics and quantum computing into sovereignty frameworks, building on the Outcome Document's AI sections (United Nations General Assembly, 2025, paras. 84-87). For instance, sessions may delve into human-AI symbiosis models, drawing from BRICS declarations on multipolar AI (BRICS, 2025a), to mitigate biases affecting BoP populations in Africa. Contextual implications include opportunities for Pan-African diplomacy to advocate for AfCFTA-aligned DPI pilots, potentially through dedicated workshops on innovative financing like debt-for-digital swaps, which could address AIFAT's funding gap concerns (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025b). Examples from prior Forums, such as the 2025 high-level event's focus on connectivity metrics (ITU, 2025), suggest that 2026 could feature case studies from African nations like Rwanda's smart city

initiatives or Nigeria's fintech ecosystems, highlighting successes and challenges in rights-respecting digital freedoms.

Edge cases warrant consideration: in conflict-affected or post-disaster regions, the Forum might prioritize resilient infrastructure discussions, incorporating environmental sustainability to counter climate-induced connectivity disruptions, an area where WSIS+20 exceeded AIFAT expectations (United Nations General Assembly, 2025, para. 42). Related considerations include enhanced youth and women-led entrepreneurship tracks, aligning with AIFAT's innovation pillar, to unlock BoP potential amid rapid technological shifts. However, potential shortfalls loom if multi-stakeholder participation remains imbalanced, with developing countries facing barriers noted in WSIS+20 (para. 5); thus, expectations include stronger capacity-building sessions and virtual inclusivity to ensure equitable input.

Overall, the Forum's agenda, shaped through open consultations (ITU, 2026c), could catalyse a "WSIS+21" momentum, urging binding follow-ups like annual progress reports on the joint road map (United Nations General Assembly, 2025, para. 122). For Africa, this implies strategic alliances with G77 and BRICS partners to embed sovereign data governance and ethical AI, fostering a truly transformative digital future while navigating geopolitical tensions and resource constraints.

## **Conclusion**

Post-WSIS+20, the Outcome Document fares moderately against AIFAT propositions, aligning in inclusive rhetoric and exceeding in environmental and AI scopes, but falling short in enforceability and Africa-specificity due to negotiation trade-offs. This perpetuates Global South challenges, with implications for Agenda 2063 implementation. African diplomacy should leverage G77-BRICS for enhanced monitoring via the road map (United Nations General Assembly, 2025, para. 122), establishing sovereign funds and metrics. Ultimately, transformative impact requires shifting from aspirations to actions, ensuring an equitable digital future (Mamun, Umegbolu and Matin, 2025a).

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