

The 7th African School on Internet Governance (AfriSIG2019) Practicum Output Document: An African Perspective on an Architecture for Global Digital Cooperation, 9 September 2019¹

About AfriSIG

The [African School on Internet Governance](#) (AfriSIG) is an annual five-day residential leadership development and knowledge building course run by the Association for Progressive Communications, co-convened with the African Union Commission (AUC) and Research ICT Africa (RIA). For more information contact afrisig@apc.org.

The AfriSIG practicum

A central part of AfriSIG is hands-on learning and the curriculum includes a rigorous practicum exercise to help fellows understand the complexity of having to analyse a current internet governance topic and then to negotiate and develop a consensus position statement while playing the roles of different actors and institutions. At AfriSIG 2019, the fellows focused on the implementation of some of the aspects of the report of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's [High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation](#) (HLPDC), [The Age of Digital Interdependence](#). The scenario presented to participants was as follows:

In each of the UN regions, a panel has been convened by the UN Secretary-General to identify the next steps in the implementation of the proposals of the HLPDC report. The participants in the AfriSIG 2019 practicum are invited to play the roles of the members of the African Implementation Panel of the HLPDC report. The main task of the African Implementation Panel is to find ways to implement the Architecture for Global Digital Cooperation based on the findings of the report. The outcome requested is a document with recommendations from the African Implementation Panel of the HLPDC Report that shall include the following elements: General reflections on the report and the report's recommendations; Recommendation on which model for digital cooperation is the most feasible for implementation from an African perspective; Recommendations on the role for the UN in the chosen model; Recommendations on the sources for sustainable funding for the functioning of the chosen model; and Recommendation on how to ensure effective participation of African stakeholders in future digital cooperation.

Participants in AfriSIG 2019 included [46 fellows](#) and [20 faculty and resource persons](#) from 33 countries. For the purpose of the practicum, participants selected a range of roles to play, from researchers, government officials and legal practitioners working for mobile phone companies, to local entrepreneurs and human rights defenders. The mock negotiations were chaired by four co-chairs (from business, government, civil society and the technical community) and one coordinating chair.

1. This document was produced by the participants in the 7th African School on Internet Governance (AfriSIG 2019) as part of the School's practicum. For the purpose of the practicum, fellows played the role of members of a fictional multistakeholder "African Implementation Panel of the HLPDC report".

I Preamble

After reviewing the report of the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation,² the "African Implementation Panel" (a panel convened from participants as part of the role-play component of the practicum of the 7th African School on Internet Governance) recommends the following:

1. It is obvious that digital technologies are rapidly transforming and impacting societies. This transformation brings with it unprecedented advances, but also gives rise to serious new challenges. Growing opportunities created by the use of digital technologies such as e-money, e-government, e-business, e-health, e-learning and e-tourism, among others, are parallel to and coupled with stark abuses and unintended consequences. In this response to the report of the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation (HLPDC), *The Age of Digital Interdependence* (hereafter "the Report"), the "African Implementation Panel" shares its reflections on: cooperation models; funding mechanisms; the role of the UN in ensuring efficient inclusion of all stakeholders in the digital ecosystem; and how to ensure African participation in digital cooperation.
2. The Report is meant to address the effect that digital technologies have on society, but more importantly, to respond to the question of "digital cooperation". The Report defines digital cooperation as the various ways in which stakeholders "work together to address the social, ethical, legal and economic impact of digital technologies in order to maximise their benefits and minimise their harm."³
3. In the words of Bertrand Russell, "The only thing that will redeem mankind is cooperation."⁴ It is against this background that the Secretary-General of the UN convened the HLPDC to interrogate how stakeholders in the internet and the broader digital world can cooperate better. The underpinning principle is that enhanced digital cooperation among different stakeholders will help in the full realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
4. To achieve digital cooperation, all stakeholders should not just be participants, but also be actively and equally involved in the agenda-setting process. Governments play a key role in setting laws and policies. They regulate and/or own digital technologies within their respective geographical jurisdictions and have the responsibility to ensure the provision of supporting infrastructure, such as electricity, which citizens need to access digital spaces such as the internet. Bearing this in mind, we strongly believe that panels such as this High-level Panel should have included more representatives from government.
5. The Report is a very important document that covers salient issues in the internet governance space and reflects usefully on how to improve access for everyone irrespective of their wealth, power, influence and skills. Generally, the Report also takes note of important steps towards the attainment of the SDGs and includes concerns related to access, data privacy, online safety and security, and digital inclusion.

2. <https://digitalcooperation.org/>

3. p7 of the report <https://digitalcooperation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/DigitalCooperation-report-web-FINAL-1.pdf>

4. Bertrand Russell, 'Human Society in Ethics and Politics' p. 212. London: Allen & Unwin, 1954.

6. The implications of some of the recommendations in the Report need further research. For example, the recommendation to bridge the access gap requires closer investigation of how the environmental impact resulting from the massive use of energy and increased ewaste can best be managed.

II Model selection

7. Members of the "African Implementation Panel", which was made up of individuals representing multiple stakeholder groups, agreed that the best option is a hybrid model composed of positive attributes from each of the three models proposed in the Report. We support the Internet Governance Forum Plus (IGF Plus) model's inclusion of a commitment from stakeholders to meet on an annual basis. Furthermore, we welcome the establishment of a Trust Fund dedicated to funding the IGF Plus model and comment on this further in the financing section of this submission. We also welcome the setting up of Internet Governance Policy Incubators and Observatories and Help Desks at the regional level and believe that in Africa, where there is significant regional and linguistic diversity, this is also needed at the sub-regional level.
8. Under the Distributed Co-Governance (CoGov) Architecture model we agreed that multistakeholder participation in the digital technology space can best be promoted through the creation of Digital Cooperation Networks (DCNs), which would focus on "specific digital issue(s), strengthening cooperation, designing or updating digital norms, providing norm implementation roadmaps and developing capacity to adopt policies and norms."⁵ We all agreed that if these DCNs generate competing norms, this will have to be mediated by the UN. However, we have reservations about the simultaneous involvement of stakeholder-based collaboration groups *and* issue-oriented sectors and institutions. Some members of the "African Implementation Panel" were of the opinion that an issue-oriented approach should be adopted in order to avoid conflict, whereas others felt that a mixed approach is better aligned with the principles of multistakeholderism.
9. Finally, we were all of the view that the transnational approach under the Digital Commons Architecture model is well-suited to promoting cooperation regarding the regulation and enjoyment of shared digital spaces, resources and responsibilities.

III Role of the UN

10. The UN has been a trusted international organisation that has championed human rights, human development and capacity building in the world since its founding. It has also, since 2006, been the convenor of the Internet Governance Forum, and has provided a platform for intergovernmental and multistakeholder discussions of internet policy and development. The UN is also a platform for mediating disagreements between governments related to internet governance.

11. We acknowledge the HLPDC's recognition of the weaknesses within the UN model.

5. The Age of Digital Interdependence, p 33.

Bearing this in mind, we recommend that the UN needs to ensure an environment that reduces the effect on digital cooperation of inequalities between countries with different sized economies and resources. That is why it is important to reconsider the UN's role in internet governance meetings and forums. We submit that with regard to digital cooperation, the UN must play the role of an impartial convener of meetings where all states and all other stakeholders from different parts of the world meet.

IV Financing the digital cooperation architecture

12. In line with the tenets of the multistakeholder approach, we propose the utilisation of one centralised sustainable funding source, namely the creation of a fully functioning and strictly regulated Digital Cooperation Trust Fund. This Fund would need to be audited after every financial year, and the process should be underpinned by the principles of transparency and accountability permitting all stakeholders access to documentation upon request.
13. This common fund will be made up of mandatory contributions from all member states who want to be included in the global digital cooperation architecture. To ensure equity, we recommend that governments make a contribution on a sliding scale in accordance with their gross domestic product (GDP) as calculated by the World Bank. Considering economic inequalities between countries, derived from the history of slavery and colonialism, we recommend that countries with a higher GDP contribute more.
14. Other stakeholders, including those from business, civil society, the technical community and the academic and research sectors, must be encouraged to contribute to the Digital Cooperation Trust Fund.

V Ensuring African participation in global digital cooperation

15. We believe that African stakeholders should occupy a central role in the future of digital cooperation. This is necessary given the persistent sidelining of African stakeholders' narratives in international fora.
16. We submit that the effective participation of African stakeholders can be promoted through several approaches listed below. Please note that this list is not exhaustive.
17. First, we submit that African stakeholders should be well represented at all levels, including the national, regional and international levels.
18. Second, we submit that existing regional and sub-regional mechanisms, such as the African Commission for Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), the African Union (AU), the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU/UMA), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), should drive conversations on digital cooperation at all levels, in the

exercise of their respective mandates – which include the promotion and protection of human and peoples’ rights – and in line with their accountability to all individuals, institutions and stakeholder groups.

19. Third, regarding the AU, we submit that each state party should provide a competent focal point in order to pursue the “effective participation” of African stakeholders in the implementation of any effort to achieve digital cooperation. We acknowledge that the AU has mechanisms for the involvement of other non-governmental African stakeholders through “observer status” mechanisms and we defer to these pre-established AU mechanisms where they are sufficient. Where they are not, they need to be strengthened so as to effectively include non-state actors, including civil society, the private sector (particularly African businesses), the technical community and the academic and research sectors.
20. Fourth, we believe that capacity-building initiatives such as the African School on Internet Governance are urgently needed for African stakeholders to fully immerse themselves in the digital cooperation conversation. We submit that funds should be set aside for this specific purpose.
21. Fifth, for African countries to participate meaningfully in digital cooperation, there has to be fast, reliable and secure connectivity. However, it should be noted that many African countries do not have the financial capacity to ensure such robust and resilient connectivity. Affordable and meaningful access to the internet remains a huge challenge in Africa. There is a clear need for African governments to invest in the capacity of their citizens by equipping them with digital and technological skills to meet market needs and to provide enabling policy and regulatory environments to allow the unconnected to connect themselves, e.g. through community networks. There is also a need for African leaders to prioritise investment in technology and digital infrastructure for sustainable digital growth and development on the continent.
22. Sixth, Africa has the largest number of unconnected people (as at June 2019 only 39% of the African population had connected to the internet, the lowest level in the world)⁶ and therefore represents the greatest potential for growth and the greatest need for innovation. It is therefore essential to ensure adequate participation of Africans in digital cooperation, and effective representation of the region in the advisory group referred to in the IGF Plus model. This will be an opportunity for Africa to highlight the potential that the continent possesses and respond to the need for African leaders to be more actively involved in the internet governance space.
23. We recommend a bottom-up approach where African stakeholders participate in the activities of different regional and global internet bodies and processes such as the Internet Governance Forum (including national and regional IGF initiatives), the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms Coalition (AfDec), African Network Information Centre (AFRINIC), Network Operators Group (NOG), Internet Society (ISOC), Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), and also other institutions that form part of the technical community, for the purpose of digital cooperation and development.

6. <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>

24. We also recommend that all deliberations on internet governance should progressively include simultaneous translation into major African languages.
25. We further recommend that women, girls, children, persons with disabilities and other minority groups be actively included in the entire process. This can be done by having significant representations from these groups at the decision-making and other relevant levels of the internet governance architecture.

VI Closing remarks

26. Finally, we want to highlight the existence of a specific barrier to internet access and to the expansion and use of technology in Africa that is stifling the effective participation of all African stakeholders, including individual citizens. Intentional internet disruptions (usually referred to as internet shutdowns) affect citizens' human rights and cause huge financial losses to both the private sector and governments. We firmly believe that active steps must be taken, at the global level, to dissuade governments and other actors who perpetrate such human rights violations through network disruptions.
27. In closing, as a diverse inter-generational group of individuals from multiple sectors and stakeholder groups, we, the members of the "African Implementation Panel" convened as part of the 7th African School of Internet Governance's practicum, pledge our commitment to participating in and strengthening efforts to digital cooperation that result from the work of the HLPDC.