Summary of Session:

*Strengthening Africa’s voices in global digital policy processes*

DiploFoundation and Permanent Missions on Djibouti, Kenya and Namibia

13 March 2023 - 11:00 - 11:45 CET


Key Issues discussed (5-8 bullet points)

- Many African countries, as well as regional and continental organisations, have put in place a wide range of strategies and policies to advance digital transformation. So the policy frameworks are there, outlining goals and priorities. But more needs to be done to ensure that these goals and priorities are advanced at an international level – through, for instance, engagement in digital governance processes.

- There is a need for strengthened cooperation – within the continent and with international partners – to implement digital transformation strategies. African actors would benefit from talking to and working with each other more. And international partners need to have a better understanding of the continent’s needs; for instance, connectivity in itself does not equal meaningful access, and issues of affordability and skills also need to be tackled as part of digital inclusion initiatives.

- One challenge ahead is how to synchronise the need to address immediate issues (e.g. ensuring meaningful access) with the need not to be left behind when it comes to cutting-edge technologies, to avoid even bigger digital divides. At the same time, African countries should resist ‘the temptation of the technological race’: ‘Make sure we know where we are, understand where we want to go, and identify the tools needed to go there. Also prioritise and build capacities.’

- No African country can follow all digital governance processes alone. Cooperation and coordination, including through defining and following a common agenda, could help ensure that African voices are better represented in international debates. Leveraging the expertise of various national actors – private entities, civil society – when it comes to international engagement is also something governments should pay more attention to.

- Diplomats need to be equipped with the proposer skills and tools to advance their countries’ interests and priorities. Building and developing capacities should focus not only on individuals, but also on institutions as a whole, so that processes and mechanisms are put in place to ensure sustainability in terms of engagement in international processes.
Towards WSIS+20 and WSIS beyond 2025, please share your views on the emerging trends, challenges, achievements, and opportunities in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines to date (5-8 bullets)

- not discussed during the session

Tangible outcomes (such as key achievements, announcements, launches, agreements, and commitments (3-5 bullet points)

- Presentation of the study ‘Stronger digital voices from Africa: Building African digital foreign policy and diplomacy’. The study analyses the participation of African countries in global policy-making fora discussing digital policy issues. Moreover, the study also provides a snapshot of Africa’s digital diplomacy by examining the holistic representation of national and continental interests in the digital realm. The study was conducted by DiploFoundation with the support of Switzerland’s Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).

Actionable plan (2-5 points)

- The session co-organisers are planning to work together on shaping a framework that would support Geneva-based missions of developing countries in following and participating in digital policy processes happening in Geneva and in other relevant multilateral fora.

Suggestions for thematic aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2024 (WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event) (one paragraph)

- Digital rights of future generations