



# REPORT OF WEBINAR ON DPG-DPI IN WEST AFRICA





## INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Inclusive Digital Africa (IIDiA) Virtual Workshop on the State of Digital Assets and Infrastructure in West Africa was held on 12 July 2023.

Twenty-five (25) panellists from West and Central African States and more than 300 participants took part. Between commitments, achievements and expectations relating to the theme, each panellist went through the realities observed on the ground. The participation of Central Africa was very marginal due to the fact that the Leaders (BEAC, BDEAC, GIMAC, and certain government authorities) considered that this region has its own specificities which require its own strategy. These leaders wanted IIDiA and the Gates Foundation to study the possibility of developing an intervention strategy tailored to Central Africa, with BEAC as the entry point.

The webinar was introduced by Ambassador Makarimi ADECHOUBOU, President of IIDiA, who on behalf of IIDiA paid a vibrant tribute to the Heads of State and Government of the African Union, ECOWAS, SADC, CEMAC, UEMOA for their exemplary leadership and vision, which made digital transformation a strategic priority to support countries in their policies of production



**Amb. Makarimi Adechoubou**

Président IIDiA

and redistribution of income for the benefit of African populations. He also welcomed the commitment of the government representatives present at this webinar before recalling that digital inclusion must be a primary objective of digital transformation programs to bridge the growing digital divide in the West African region.

For the President, digital is the opportunity that Africa must seize to exploit its full potential; here is why IIDiA's reason for being revolves around these three (3) keys messages:

- IIDiA remains convinced that the potential of digital transformation for African economies can be inclusive and achieve the participation of all social strata of the continent in the digital economy.

- Support for digital equity is becoming an imperative to help all stakeholders define inclusive business models, build the capacity of stakeholders and professionals to fill the gaps, address digital literacy skills through sustainable approaches. This support can be effective with technical support and if advocacy is made at the level of each state for the development of policies supporting equitable growth in favor of digital.

- Governments and policymakers with their development partners and the private sector should collaborate to build sustainable infrastructure, policies and regulations that enable access to digital goods and infrastructure for all.

To do this, the workshop on the state of play of digital assets and infrastructure in West Africa was organized around four (4) objectives:

- 1- Share the methodological framework and gather guidance from stakeholders to achieve a relevant and inclusive strategy document for the region;

- 2- Give the floor to government officials, regional economic communities, development banks, central banks as well as private sector leaders to share their visions and expectations regarding the infrastructure and digital goods and services development strategy for the region

3- Identify gaps or priority needs to be covered as part of the strategy

4- Mobilize stakeholders for the success of the process of developing the infrastructure and digital goods and services development strategy for the region.

The exchange session was initially launched by Mr. Mathieu SOGLONOU, IIDIA Special Advisor, who set the context for the workshop, before giving the floor to Mr. Kosta PERIC, Deputy Director, Financial Services for the Poor at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to set the scene.



## Kosta Peric

Deputy Director, Financial Services for the Poor  
at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

The latter recalled that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as part of its actions to support financial inclusion and gender equality in the use of financial services in Africa, works with its partners. They assist governments, central banks and the private sector to deploy inclusive digital platforms for digital identity and instant payments. The field of Goods, Services and Digital Public Infrastructures is, according to him, one in which many African countries have projects in this area.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, Kosta Peric also mentioned, African governments are increasingly adopting strategies focused on public digital infrastructure and goods. This type of strategy ensures quality and sovereignty and enables the adoption of digital platforms for accelerating financial inclusion across Africa. With these words, he wished the panelists a very productive workshop on the chosen theme.





## 1. STATE OF THE PREMISES OF DIGITAL PUBLIC ASSETS AND INFRASTRUCTURES

# Part One: State of the Premises of Digital Public Assets and Infrastructures

First panelist, Ms. Cina LAWSON, Minister of Digital Economy and Digital Transformation of Togo, spoke about her country's experience in the development of digital infrastructure and Togo's vision for digital and its development.



## Mme Cina Lawson

Ministre de l'Économie numérique et de la Transformation digitale

Several initiatives have already been implemented: "Novissi" programme which, during the Covid-19 pandemic, made it possible to assist vulnerable groups with cash transfers to support them in view of the restrictive measures put in place. In total, USD 34 million was distributed to 920,000 people, representing nearly 25% of the adult population.

In terms of cybersecurity, Togo has a national cybersecurity agency that aims not only to serve Togo but also the rest of Africa: Cyberdefense Africa. Another initiative, digital technology was used in the implementation of the pass-Covid which makes it possible to issue, verify and certify authorisations.

In terms of vision, Togo wants to be a leader in the development of digital infrastructures. This results in the implementation of a strategy broken down into 3 pillars and 9 programs cited by the Minister.

**1-The first pillar of the digitalization strategy is to include all citizens of Togolese society in the economy and find a way to fiberize the country quickly and at affordable costs.**

This pillar has three programs:

**a)** biometric identity in partnership with the World Bank through the NOZIP platform. As part of this project, it is planned to digitize the civil status via an Open Source platform.

**b)** the second programme is the establishment of a single social register, the need for which was demonstrated during the pandemic because it was necessary to be able to identify all vulnerable populations.

**c)** the third programme of this first pillar is connectivity because there is no digitalisation without connectivity. This implies the need for employability for the majority young population (18 years - 35 years). To attract businesses, create businesses Togo needs stable very high speed broadband.

**2-The second pillar is the digitization of public services and basic social services.** In East Africa, digitization is very advanced, but in Togo, the digitization of the public sector will lead to the digitization of the entire economy because of the weight of the State. This pillar also has three programmes.

**a)** digitalisation of public services;

**b)** digitalisation of basic social services;

**c)** digitalisation of payments.

**3-The third pillar is the acceleration and transformation of the Togolese economy to support wealth creation** with 3 programs: a-) the digitization of key sectors of the economy such as logistics and financial services of agriculture b-) the support of the national innovation ecosystem (startups) c-) the third very important program is named the valorization of data.

In West Africa, as countries are digitized, we are going to accumulate a lot of data that needs to be collected and protected because it is worth gold. This is why Togo is among the first countries in Africa to have adopted regulations on the protection of personal data. With regard to Niger, the vision is to make digital accessible to all in the long term with a dynamic and innovative private sector in a high-performance ecosystem.

A vision consisting of 4 major axes presented by Mr. Hassan BARAZE MOUSSA, the Minister of Post and New Information Technologies. These include open and affordable access to digital networks and services, having a connected administration serving citizens and businesses, the dissemination of digital technology in priority economic sectors and the promotion of an innovative and job-creating industry.



### M. Hassan Baraze Moussa

Ministre de l'Économie numérique et de la Transformation digitale

It is also noted that initiatives are being implemented as part of this vision, with investments in the development of these infrastructures. For example, the project to deploy more than 4000 km of optical fiber, the Smart Village project, the interconnection and modernization of the administration project, among others.

Subsequently, Mr. Ibrahima GUIMBA, Minister Counsellor and Director General of the National Agency for the Information Society (ANSI) spoke about the Niger 2.0 strategic plan in execution for a few years. He returned, among other things, to the Smart Village project with a connectivity center with about 2,600 villages to cover over 36 months. The country is in the process of deploying 150 digital centers (90 of which are already operational) for human capital development. Moreover, Niger has just launched a call for tenders to connect 1,000 schools and 300 health centres, and plans to launch a drone and data academy.

Other initiatives, the organization of a competition in the field monitored by the State, the deployment of thousands of kilometers of optical fiber to promote digital access to more Nigeriens and integration in the field of health with the use of machines that detect malaria.



### M. Ibrahima Guimba

Ministre Conseiller et Directeur Général de l'ANSI

Mr. Inoussa Traore, Special Advisor to the President of Faso, also returned to the initiatives implemented for the achievement of Burkina Faso's vision in the field of digital, a major axis in the transition process. The objective of this vision is to improve access to digital technology and to use it for administrative and public reforms in a spirit of transparency in the conduct of public procurement and the fight against corruption.



### M. Inoussa Traore

Conseiller Spécial du Président du Faso

Among the achievements, we mention, among others, an electronic platform for the settlement of fines, the implementation of nearly 6000 km of optical fibers in recent years, and the activation of the universal service fund which has made it possible to cover 200 to 300 rural localities by 2G and 3G connection. In terms of challenges, they are mainly infrastructural.

Regarding Benin, Mr. Ouanilo MEDEGAN FAGLA, Member of the Monitoring Unit for Digital Projects and Reforms Presidency of the Republic of Benin, said that digital technology has been a high priority since 2016 for the government, which literally places it in all sectors.



### M. Ouanilo Medegan Fagla

Membre de la Cellule de suivi des projets et réformes du numérique, Présidence de la République

He mentions the establishment of an intelligent administration via the national infrastructure, which makes it possible to guarantee the reliability of paperless transactions through electronic trust services and cites, among other things, a national interoperability platform that facilitates communication between all government bases to avoid the duplication of data; the ALAFIA microcredit project which has made it possible to deliver tens of billions to decentralized populations, a data center operational for a few months, the national public services portal, the implementation of an electronic payment platform, and a national e-visa platform.

The country also has a National Artificial Intelligence and Metadata Strategy. In the GTMI ranking, Benin now ranks 8th among African countries in terms of digitization of public services, and in the International Telecommunication Union ranking, Benin is the 6th country in Africa in terms of cyber security.

Currently, the government of Benin's priorities are to align with the technological innovations of the moment through artificial intelligence. Specifically, they include:

- The national strategy for artificial intelligence and mega-data, which will serve to perpetuate all initiatives in the massive data collection and learning that artificial intelligence offers.
- The strategy of secure access to digital for the general public. It initially targets students with community points now active in the country so that people can have access to the digital tool.
- The second phase of the very high-speed network densification project that has just been launched to add nearly 5000 km of fibre to the existing network.

To recap this first part, Amb. Makarimi Abissola ADECHOUBOU, President of IIDiA, retains 5 points:

- (i) the focus on the rate of digital and internet penetration to promote financial inclusion,
- (ii) the strengthening of human capital in the field,
- (iii) the effort put on the digitization of public services,
- (iv) data protection,
- (iv) and digital awareness.



### Amb. Makarimi Adechoubou

Président IIDiA





## 2. ONGOING WORK AND CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL EXPANSION IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

## Part Two: Ongoing Work and Challenges of Digital Expansion in African Countries



**M. Abossé Akue-Kpakpo**

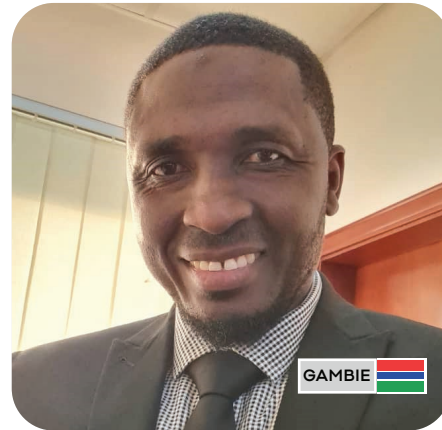
Directeur de l'Economie Numérique, UEMOA

Mr. ABOSSÉ AKUE-KPAKPO, Director of Digital Economy at the UEMOA Commission presented the Regional Programme for the Development of Digital Economy. This five-year strategy takes into account the governance of the digital economy sector, and aims to increase people's access to digital, innovation and research development, among others. This programme has four strategic axes:

- 1- Governance of the digital economy sector
- 2- Increasing people's access to digital through infrastructure, the availability of broadband even in the most remote localities.
- 3- The offer of digital services that involves the digitization of public administration.
- 4- Innovation and especially the transformation of innovation into consumer goods and services.

UEMOA plans to digitize 120 public and private services in each of its member states and wants to increase the capacities of digital service providers. Then the UEMOA Commission hopes to organize next November a round table of donors to finance this program which amounts to 131 billion CFA francs.

With regard to the Gambia, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy, Mr. Lamin Camara, also referred to ongoing projects in the sector. And to mention, among others, a platform being developed to set up



**M. Lamin Camara**

Secrétaire permanent au ministère de la communication et de l'économie numérique

a digital identifier system. The country also encourages Mobile Money and e-commerce. As for Mali represented at this webinar by Mr. Coulibaly SOUHAHEBOU, Technical Advisor to the Ministry of Digital, the vision since 2015 is to make information and communication technology a vector of rural development and a source of productivity and added value for other economic sectors as well as for public administration in terms of digital



**M. Souhahébou Coulibaly**

Conseiller Technique - Représentant du Ministre du Numérique

infrastructure. Thus, at the central level, the State has 3 large data centers, to which are added other data centers belonging to individuals, with 10,000 km of optical fiber deployed.

As an innovation, Mali has the biometric card. In the development of this map, applications have been developed to help citizens find the polling stations. We also mention the transmission infrastructures that make it possible to give the results of the elections in real time. In addition, there are electronic payment methods, in particular VSEs, to allow secure transactions without moving around. A geolocation application has also been created to allow the traceability of means of transport, in particular those of the State. Findings were made to strengthen the existing with virtual landing points, broadband connection, internet exchange point, third-party level 3 data centers. From now on, Mali plans to equip the population with terminals that can facilitate the use of the digital tools available and that these tools are developed in the national languages. Current challenges also include setting up a virtual landing point, channeling operations and strengthening internet exchange.

The DRC, represented by Mr. Florent MOUTEBA, Advisor to the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and New Information and Communication Technologies, is facing the test of its surface area which poses challenges especially for connectivity.



### **M. Florent Muteba**

Conseiller - Ministère des Postes,  
Telecom et NTIC

But work is underway on fibre optics to bring connectivity back to fairly remote corners, the speaker announced. Indeed, a feasibility study is underway to reach the installation of 45,000 km of optical fiber. The relief of the country does not facilitate the deal, but 6000 to 8000 km of fiber have already been installed.

Regarding the financial sector, at the digital level, initiatives are being put in place to try to catch up on payments and the digitization of public services. The President of the Republic has launched a program of 145 territories that will consist of faster access to health care and information throughout the territory. Structuring connectivity and determining whether to go to optical or satellite fiber is one of the issues that the DRC is working on to provide access to connection throughout the territory. The country wants to work with other countries that have already evolved in the field to learn from their experience.

As for Guinea, its representative at this webinar is Mr. Demba Traore, project manager of the digital interoperability platform. The project concerns the establishment of a digital interoperability platform to connect financial institutions and state services. It aims to create financial inclusion by connecting mobile payment users and bank accounts.

For Mr. Alex SEA, Director of AFRICA Fintech FORUM, financial inclusion is of great importance in the development of African economies and the continent itself. Reason for his organization works to support and develop ecosystems in the field of digital finance. It works with the private and public sector to improve access to financial services for the African population. Similarly, Mr. SEA's teams worked with the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) to initiate the first workshop with fintechs to help the regulator understand Fintech issues. The focus of financial inclusion must be on rural areas, women and youth, he insists.



### **M. Alex Sea**

Directeur Africa Fintech Forum

Representing Cameroon, Mr. Jean Paul NANGA, Director of Infrastructure and Access Networks of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, made an intervention based on the country's strategic plan in the field, the major achievements as well as the challenges they face. He pleaded for a specific strategy tailored to Central Africa.

Representative of the Minister of Digital of Benin, Mr. Hector AGBO, Director of Digitalization, completed the intervention of Mr. Ouanilo Medegan by presenting the achievements and reforms undertaken by the Beninese government in the digital sector, as well as the structuring projects put in place.

In terms of achievements and reforms, the government has undertaken reforms to promote digital transformation, investments in the digital sector, the emergence of players in the field of mobile telephony, the establishment of a global public sector operator for fixed and mobile services, the creation of the Beninese broadcasting infrastructure company for the transition to digital terrestrial television, and the revision of the regulatory framework with the development of a digital law.

Regarding structuring projects, we cite the Deployment of high-speed internet throughout the national territory with more than 2000 km of optical fiber, the rehabilitation of the national fiber optic network, the continuous deployment of the internet in non-covered areas, the establishment of smart administration and development of digital uses, the integration of digital at the level of local authorities, and the modernization of public service media.

Dr. Hermann MESSAN, Inclusive Finance Expert and IIDIA Team Leader presented the methodological framework of the DPG/DPI study that will be carried out, as well as the planned interactions with stakeholders. The study will include a literature review and exchanges with actors from the public, private sector, solution promoters etc., Interactions with stakeholders will continue virtually. Exchanges will take place with different government entities, regional and chambers of commerce. There will be the final validation of the strategy that will be deployed with the support of the Foundation.

The strategy will be specific for West and Central Africa, due to differences in realities. The goal is to

have a specific approach for each region to ensure effective deployment.



**Dr. Hermann Messan**

Team Leader IIDiA

Senior Advisor IIDIA, Mr. Eric EKUE highlighted the difficulties encountered in the effective use of services by the population. And to emphasize that these difficulties must be taken into account in future strategies. Despite the existence of the services, there are difficulties in using them effectively.



**M. Eric Ekue**

Senior Advisor IIDiA

A large portion of the population, especially in informal rural and urban settings, has difficulty accessing government services directly online. To ensure inclusive access, it is necessary to put in place tools adapted to the needs and realities of the populations.

Mr. Blaise AHOUANTCHEDE, IIDIA Senior Advisor, noted the importance of consultation and training to

bridge the existing gap in the use of digital services. Initiatives have been taken in terms of consultation and training. However, there is still a significant gap to be filled, given the large number of people involved. It is recommended that these initiatives be formally integrated into the overall strategy to ensure effective integration of all segments of the population. Regional integration between West and Central Africa is desired.



**M. Blaise Ahouantchede**

Expert Senior, IIDiA

He also stressed the importance of knowing our environment in order to meet the challenges and issues related to the use of digital. It also focused on challenges related to human capital, information exchange, technology watch and coordination between countries.

Mr. Mathieu SOGLONOU thanked the participation of all stakeholders, and presented the next steps and the planned action plan for the development of a strategy.



**Mathieu Soglonou**

Senior Advisor, IIDiA

These are the consultations that will be conducted with countries and regional actors to refine the diagnosis and define priorities, and a webinar that will be organised to discuss actions to be undertaken in collaboration with the Foundation. Mr SOGLONOU says that IIDiA and the Foundation will look into the possibility of developing their own strategy for Central Africa.

With regard to the Action Plan and Implementation Mechanism, the objective is to support regional integration efforts and respond to country priorities. An inclusive and consensual strategy will be developed, taking into account everyone's concerns. The Melinda Gates Foundation will provide financial support for the development of this strategy.





Mr ADECHOUBOU, IIDIA PCA concluded the workshop by thanking the participants, country representatives, ministers, general secretaries, experts and the Melinda Gates Foundation for their contribution to the workshop. Not to mention the organizing team and all those who contributed behind the scenes. Engagement with stakeholders will continue to finalize the strategy.



The workshop was a success and marks the beginning of the process of developing the regional strategy for digital public goods and infrastructure. Work will continue with commitments made during consultations and fieldwork.



### 3. SUMMARY

## Part Three: Summary of the Expectations and Challenges expressed by the different parties

Country	Expectations/Challenges
 Togo	Implementation of the digital infrastructure development strategy. A strategy broken down into 3 pillars and 9 programs.
 Niger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implementation of the digital strategy broken down into 4 axes.</li> <li>- Enhancing human capital</li> </ul>
 Burkina Faso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improving access to digital technology and using it for administrative and public reforms in a spirit of transparency in the conduct of public procurement and the fight against corruption</li> <li>- Making digital a major focus in the transition process</li> <li>- Infrastructure challenges.</li> </ul>
 Benin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implementation of a National Artificial Intelligence and Metadata Strategy to sustain all initiatives in the massive data collection and learning that artificial intelligence offers.</li> <li>- Full operationalization of the secure digital access strategy for the general public.</li> <li>- Densification of the very high-speed network to add nearly 5000 km of fibre to the existing network.</li> </ul>
UEMOA Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implementation of the Regional Program for the Development of the Digital Economy through the digitization of 120 public and private services in each of the states.</li> <li>- Participation in the round table of donors to finance this program which amounts to 131 billion CFA francs.</li> </ul>
 Gambia	Development of a platform for the establishment of a digital identifier system
 Mali	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make ICTs a vector of rural development and a source of productivity and added value for other economic sectors</li> <li>- Set up a virtual landing point, channelling operations and strengthening internet exchange.</li> </ul>
 DRC	- Geographic challenges to accelerate access to connectivity in all provinces and villages of the DRC.
 Guinea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implementation of the digital interoperability platform project which concerns the establishment of a digital interoperability platform to connect financial institutions and state services.</li> <li>- Developing financial inclusion by connecting mobile payment users and bank accounts</li> </ul>

Country	Expectations/Challenges
 Africa Fintech Forum The Ivory Coast	Focus on rural areas, women and youth for strong financial inclusion
 Cameroon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implementation of the Digital Strategic Plan</li> <li>- Support for the development of statutory tests of the post and telecommunications (ICT) sector in Cameroon</li> <li>- Development of cross-sectoral digital platforms.</li> </ul>





# IIDiA Institute for Inclusive Digital Africa

