Second Continental Meeting on Harmonization of ICT & Digital Policies and Regulations

High Level Panel "Creating an Enabling Environment for the Single Digital Market in Africa"

A Virtual Meeting to present the new Harmonisation Methodology and Tool to support the creation of an enabling environment conducive to accelerate digital transformation and the establishment of a Single Digital Market in Africa took place virtually from 16-18 June 2021.
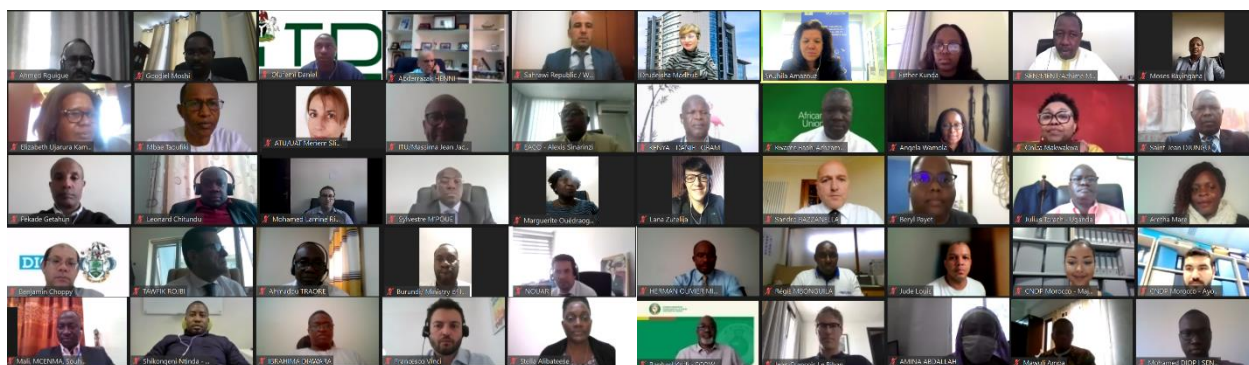
A Continental Meeting on Harmonisation of ICT & Digital Policies and Regulations brought together more than One Hundred Twenty (120) participants from AU Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Regional Association of Regulators, African Telecommunication Union (ATU), ITU Regional Office for Africa, Africa Network of Data Protection Authorities as well as representatives from Private sector and partners namely the European Union.

Following the Continental Consultative Meeting on Harmonization of ICT Policy and Regulatory frameworks held in September 2019 where Experts and Senior Government Officials from fifty (50) African Union Member States and Regional Organisations identified a number of areas of common interest that require continental harmonization. The AU Commission, within the framework of implementation of the Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa (PRIDA) project[1], started working on two topics namely "Conditions of Entry into the Market (Authorization/Licensing Regime)" and "Data Protection & Location" and established

an Expert Working Group for each topic with the aim to enhance the Pan-African harmonization status of each topic and assess the impact on Africa economy and society.

In line with its strategic mandate and role in harmonizing ICT &Digital policies and regulations, the African Union Commission with EU Technical Assistance support developed a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) methodology and tool to measure the extent of harmonisation of the above mentioned two topics and tested them in 10 countries namely: Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, South Africa, Tunisia and Zambia (2 country per region).

During this meeting, the results of the analysis and related country reports were presented to Member States for final review and validation before expanding the implementation to all countries. The overall objective of this gathering of African policymakers and regulators is to discuss the lessons learned from this exercise and see how to move forward the harmonisation of Digital policy, legal and regulatory frameworks to pave the way for the establishment of a common digital market and inclusive digital economy in Africa.

in his opening remarks Mr. Thomas Huyghebaert Head of cooperation, representing the EU Delegation to the African Union, recalled that PRIDA is a key flagship of the AU (African Union) – EU (European Union) cooperation and underlined its importance and potential to boost Africa digital transformation along the works of the Africa-Europe Alliance Digital Economy Task Force (DETF) and with initiatives such as the Africa-Europe Digital for Development Hub (D4D Hub) and the AU-EU Data Flagship.

On behalf of the AU Commission, Mr. Moses Bayingana, Ag. Head of Information Society Division, Infrastructure & Energy, welcomed the participants to the meeting and noted the contribution of the PRIDA project towards developing of harmonized continental frameworks that promote affordable services for all African citizens in line with the objectives of the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020-2030).

In the margins of the Continental Meeting on Harmonization, the AU Commission and Smart Africa co-organised a Side Event on **"Creating an Enabling Environment for the Single Digital Market in Africa"** on 18 June 2021.

A High Level Multi Stakeholder Panel discussion was organized with Five (05) inspirational African Experts where each panelist member provided his views and insights on how to create the right policy environment and appropriate regulatory conditions for the establishment of Single Digital Market in Africa.

The panel was composed of **Mr. Kwame Baah-Acheamfuor**, Senior Adviser to the Minister of ICT Ghana; **Mr. Daniel Obam**, Communications Secretary , National Communication Secretariat , Ministry of ICT and Innovation& Youth Affairs, Kenya ; **Mrs. Drud Caullychurn-Madhub**, Commissioner, Data Protection Office Mauritius ; **Mrs. Angela Wamola** , Head Africa Office , GSMA ;**Mrs. Onica N. Makwakwa**, Africa Regional Coordinator, World Wide Web Foundation (Civile Society).

The panel was moderated by Ms. Souhila Amazouz, Senior Policy Officer, African Union Commission who engaged the panellists in a conversation on key aspects of the digital single market such as harmonization of legal and regulatory frameworks, consumer protection, regulatory cooperation, data regulations, affordable access to digital services and networks as well as intra- Africa digital trade and the need for breaking down barriers to facilitate cross border online activities.

The official segments of the program for the side event started with opening remarks from Mr. Thibaut KLEINER, Director, Policy Strategy and Outreach, DG CONNECT, EU Commission, who recalled the need for close cooperation between African and European countries to fast forward the digital transformation in the two continents. In his Keynote address Mr. KLEINER invited Africa to leverage on the lessons learned from establishing the EU Single Digital Market and recalled the joint EU-AU digital priorities reflected in the EU Digital Compass and the AU DTS, notably digital skills, digital infrastructure, digital transformation of businesses and digitalisation of public services. He highlighted the EU support to existing EU-AU programs and flagships and their essential contribution to the creation of an Africa digital ecosystem and human-centric digital economy and society.

For his part Mr. Didier Nkurikiyimfura, Director of Technology and Innovation at the Smart Africa Secretariat, emphasized the work being done by Smart Africa on Digitalization namely the Smart Africa's vision to transform Africa into a Single Digital Market by 2030 that aims at enabling African countries and citizens to fully benefit from the numerous ongoing interventions within the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) across the continent.

Mr. Nkurikiyimfura further emphasized that Smart Africa acknowledges the need for stakeholder participation in the harmonization processes and reiterated the commitment of Smart Africa to accelerate the economic integration of the continent through concrete flagship projects such as the long-term bulk purchase of sub-marine and/or Satellite bandwidth and the interoperability of digital identity.

On behalf of the AU Commission, Mr. Moses Bayingana, highlighted ongoing efforts to build an enabling environment for an African digital ecosystem that fosters the sustainable development of Africa's Digital Single Market to boost economic growth and social inclusion. He further observed that ICT contribution to the implementation of the AfCFTA is needed through the development of digital infrastructures, platforms and applications to facilitate intra-Africa electronic transactions and delivery of services to boost Africa's digital economy.

Mr. Bayingana concluded the meeting by thanking all participants and calling for the acceleration of ongoing work on harmonization of ICT policy frameworks, development of the Continental Data Policy Framework to create a common Africa Data Space and the Digital ID Interoperability Framework to lay the foundations for the establishment of harmonized regional and continental digital ID systems

About PRIDA

"PRIDA" stands for "Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa". It is a joint initiative of the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) that aims at enabling the African continent to reap the benefits of digitalisation,

by addressing various dimensions of broadband demand and supply in Africa and by building the capacities of African stakeholders in the Internet Governance space.

The five years initiative (2018 - 2023) is supported by the EU-funded Pan African Programme, with a specific envelope of 9.5 Mo€, and a contribution to the African Union Budget to the level of up to 1 Mo€ per year.

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