

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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Pan-African Parliament workshop paves the way for the adoption of open data principles across the African Union



Convened by the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), a meeting on Enhancing Access to African Legal Information has laid the foundation for a unified and cohesive approach to knowledge management and the implementation of open data principles, ensuring harmonized practices and maximizing its benefits across the African Union (AU).

The workshop reached a consensus on close collaboration and adoption of an inclusive approach, among all relevant organs, departments, directorates, offices, and units, to develop a comprehensive strategy for open data implementation to foster transparency and accessibility whilst aligned to the values and objectives of the AU.

In this regard, an action team led by the Information and Communication Directorate (ICD) of the AU will be established to develop a road map for the implementation of standards, and institutional and legal framework and strategy for the continental body.

Organized from 14 to 15 June 2023, at the seat of the Pan-African Parliament in Midrand, South Africa, the workshop sought to explore the potential benefits of open data and a common way forward for the publication of information.

Defining open data as data that is freely available for anyone to access, use, and share without restrictions and is an essential aspect of digital transformation, the meeting noted that the implementation of open data principles and the creation of open data portals can assist AU institutions in making information publicly and easily available; promoting transparency and accountability; enabling citizens to participate in decision-making processes; as well as enhancing knowledge on the impact of the AU as it implements Agenda 2063.

The two-day workshop gathered representatives from AU organs and institutions such as the Pan-African Parliament(PAP); African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR); African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR); African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC); Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC); Information and Communication Directorate (ICD); Office of the Deputy Chairperson (DCP) of the AU Commission; Office of the Legal Counsel(OLC); and the African Governance Architecture Secretariat (AGA-APSA). It also included partners from the Open Data Consortium including the African Law Institute (African LII) and Laws Africa.

The gathering covered in-depth presentations and discussions on various thematic issues including the importance of open data portals in promoting transparency, accountability, and public participation in AU institutions; challenges and opportunities associated with implementing open data portals; best practices and experiences in implementing open data portals within AU; opportunities available through inter-linking data across the AU and the need for a standard format for documents; and how the publishing of AU legal information can enhance tracking of implementation of decisions and policies of the AU institutions.

In his welcome remarks, Mr. Gali Massa Harou, Acting Clerk of the Pan-African Parliament urged participants to "seize the opportunity to collaborate, share knowledge and experiences, and chart a course that enables the AU to fully harness the potential of open data and access to legal information in service of Africa's progress".

The Information and Communication Directorate, working with the relevant AU stakeholders will provide overall leadership and coordination throughout this processs, including the submission of relevant reports to the Specialised Technical Committee (STC) on Communication & ICT.

Speaking during the workshop, Ms. Leslie Richer, Director for Information and Communication described the ICD's role in coordinating the implementation of decisions on communication by the STC, using various strategies and channels.

"In addition to informing, it's also the Directorate's responsibility to create awareness about all AU treaties in a manner that brings the AU closer to the African citizenry. Therefore, the goal of all knowledge management systems should be to position the AU as a people-centered union through better access and understanding of its mandates and key programmes," said Ms. Richer.

The workshop on Enhancing Access to African Legal Information was organized with the support of the African Governance Architecture Support Project (AGA-SP) to support AGA Platform Members in adopting open data principles. The AGA-SP is part of the partnership and collaboration between the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) aimed at strengthening the capacity of AGA Platform members and promoting effective coordination and cooperation among them.

Ms. Lindiwe Khumalo, Technical Head of the AGA Bureau said the meeting report would be submitted to the leadership of the platform during the next meeting.

"Our conclusions shall be shared with relevant stakeholders and the respective political leaderships, recommending the development of an integrated, open, accessible, and transparent knowledge management system for the AU," indicated Ms. Khumalo.

The goal of the recently concluded consultation is an AU-wide knowledge and information portal that is based on open data principles, agile, flexible, inter, and cross-linked with portals of individual AU organs and institutions.

The Pan-African Parliament has already started the process of implementing an open data portal, becoming the first AU organ to initiate the process. As such, the Parliament will play a key role in bringing other organs up to speed on the importance of open data as well as technical and capacity requirements and capabilities needed for open data adoption - including mapping and categorizing the data and information.

For further information please contact:

Jeffrey Onganga | Media and Communications | Pan-African Parliament | **Tel:** +27 115455000 ext 5307/Mobile : +27 79 074 0005 | **E-mail** jeffrey.onganga@panafricanparliament.org | Midrand, South Africa

Information and Communication Directorate, African Union Commission | **E-mail:** DIC@africa-union.org
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