INTERNET GOVERNANCE FORUM IN BENIN

FINAL REPORT 2023

12Ème Edition

FORUM NATIONAL SUR LA GOUVERNANCE DE L'INTERNET AU BENIN

Thème :

Disponibilité de l'Internet à cout abordable pour tous les usages en tout lieu au Benin

12th Edition | September 09th, 2023 | Azalaï Hôtel de la Plage de Cotonou, BÉNIN

Introduction

The annual Internet Governance Forum, and the regional and national forums associated with it, are the embodiment of the recommendations made at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) organized by the United Nations in Tunis in 2005. As part of this dynamic, like many other countries, Benin has been holding its own National Internet Governance Forum since 2011. IGF initiatives are organized in accordance with five fundamental principles: openness and transparency, inclusiveness, ascendancy, non-commerciality, and multistakeholderism. The 2023 session of Benin's National Forum on Internet Governance proposes to address the crucial issue of "Affordable Internet availability for all uses everywhere in Benin".

For the past few years, digital technologies have been established as an important enabler for the transformation of Benin's economy and society in general. To realize this vision, it is imperative to resolve the fundamental problems linked to Internet access. Indeed, the Internet plays a fundamental role in creating the technological foundations needed to develop the digital economy. It supports innovation, operational efficiency, access to global markets, and the creation of a more interconnected society. The successful integration of the Internet into economic processes is an essential catalyst for economic growth and sustainable development in the digital age. To this end, major efforts have been made to develop programs, infrastructures and tools. These tools have enabled a significant improvement in the availability and quality of digital goods and services now available on the Internet in Benin. Nevertheless, we must also acknowledge the persistence of major digital divides with regard to the Internet, which are a barrier to mass migration to the digital economy.

This report will present the objectives underlying the 2023 edition of the National Forum on Internet Governance in Benin, outline the expected results of the work, present the overall process, and conclude with the results achieved and the recommendations of the stakeholders for an affordable Internet for all uses everywhere in Benin.

1. Objectives

The overall objective of the 12th IGF in Benin is firstly, to establish a causal link between the Internet and socio-economic development in Benin's current context, and secondly, to assess the availability and accessibility of the Internet for all sectors of activity, regardless of department, commune or village. More specifically, the 12th edition of the IGF Benin will enable players to :

- Present an overview of the different existing initiatives aimed at guaranteeing better Internet availability in Benin.
- Discuss the uses and sociology of Internet use in Benin, in order to identify those that have a positive impact on the country's overall development.
- Contextualize the concept of "affordability anywhere" in Benin, and identify associated constraints.
- Propose concrete, realistic solutions to make the Internet available, at an affordable cost, for all types of use, in all inhabited areas of the national territory.

2. Expected results

At the end of the forum, the following results are expected:
- An inventory of the initiatives taken by the various players to ensure better Internet availability in Benin;
- The uses and sociology of Internet use in Benin are analyzed in terms of their impact on the country's overall development, and possible solutions are identified to improve their impact on every user everywhere;
- The constraints linked to the "affordable cost everywhere" factor of the Internet in Benin are discussed and identified;
- Concrete, realistic solutions are proposed to make the Internet available, at affordable cost for all types of use, in all inhabited areas of the country.

3. The overall process of Benin IGF 2023

It should be reminded that Benin, since 2012, has been organizing its annual Internet Governance Forum, in accordance with the five fundamental principles: openness, transparency, inclusiveness, bottom-up (i.e. decision-making goes from the community to the top), non-commerciality, and multi-stakeholder. The overall process took place in three main phases: the preparatory phase, the Forum itself, and the post-session phase. All the tasks in this process were carried out by subcommittees under the supervision of Jérémie ADJA, the elected chair of the multi-stakeholder advisory group.

➢ Preparatory phase

The preparatory phase began in July 2023 with the setting up of the MAG and the creation of a discussion forum open to all. It is important to remember that the MAG is made up of volunteers from various stakeholder groups (public sector, private sector, civil society, technical community, international organization, etc.). This initiative originates from the Global IGF and the African Union's Policy and Regulatory Initiative for Digital Africa (PRIDA). The members of the MAG have been divided into seven thematic subcommittees, each with a WhatsApp forum to discuss and accomplish their tasks. The subcommittees created are as follows:
- Coordination sub-committee
- Communications and Public Relations Sub-Committee
- Mailling sub-committee
- Logistics and practical organization sub-committee
- Reception and Installation Sub-Committee
- Writing and Reporting Sub-Committee
- English Translation, Protocol and Hospitality Sub-Committee

The activities of this preparatory phase are :
- Drafting of the terms of reference (ToR)
- Finding sponsors
- Creation of communication visuals
- Setting up a website for the 2023 edition of the IGF Benin
- Drafting and distribution of physical and electronic mailings
- Follow-up on mailings
- Preparation of a room for the event
- Preparation and testing of technical equipment
- Troubleshooting transmission problems for online participants
- Production of attendance lists and mailing list
- Preparation of draft final communiqué and thank-you letters
- Management of e-mails, telephone calls and social networks.

These activities cut across four preparatory meetings, the purpose of which was to take regular stock of progress made, difficulties encountered, challenges and constraints, and to consider short-term prospects for resolving them. A report was produced after each of these meetings.

➢ **The event**

Three main stages marked the Forum on Saturday, September 09, 2023. These are the opening ceremony, the conduct of the sessions, and the final release..
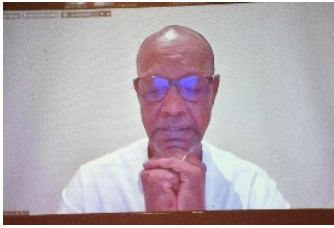
Opening ceremony

The opening ceremony was marked by several important interventions, including those of the President of the MAG, the President of Benin IGF, the Resident Representative of the United Nations System in Benin, and the Representative of the Minister of Digital and Digitalization.

The President of the MAG, Jérémie ADJA, warmly welcomed all participants in his introductory speech while apologizing to the organizing committee for the delay in starting activities. He expressed his joy to organize the 12th edition of the forum with a committee composed of forty-four members.He pointed out the important role of the MAG in coordinating Internet actors, highlighting the multi-stakeholder entity that organizes each IGF.

Wilfrid QUENUM, current President of IGF Benin, greeted the participants and recalled the evocative theme of IGF 2023: "Availability of internet at affordable costs for all uses everywhere in Benin". He highlighted the need to make an overview after many years of operation and encouraged fruitful exchanges between participants, in accordance with the recommendations of the World Civil Society Summit..

The Resident Representative of the United Nations system in Benin congratulated the organizers and highlighted the importance of the forum as an inclusive event to expand the use of the Internet. He pointed out the role of governments in harmonizing laws and users' rights, highlighting the key factors of "accessibility, affordability and equity" related to the theme of the forum. He encouraged participants to take advantage of the diversity of actors to provide multi-sectoral solutions.

The representative of the Minister greeted the initiatives of the Forum and encouraged active interaction among the participants, thus officially launching the activities of the Forum.

Sessions

The Forum was held in hybrid mode, both in-room and online, with four sessions led by moderators and panelists from various stakeholders. Each moderator introduced his session and gave the floor to the panelists, while encouraging the active participation of participants to contribute to the discussions.

Summary of session 1: Overview of Internet availability in Benin.

The Panel on "The State of Internet Availability in Benin" was moderated by Dr. Kossi AMESSINOU and Mrs. GBAGUIDI Karine KEREKOU. This session was moderated by a group of panelists including Harold ADJAHO, representative of the Internet Society Benin (ISOC BENIN), and Laurence TCHOTCHAGBE, representative of the Agence des Systèmes d'Information et du Numérique (ASIN).

Several crucial points were highlighted during this discussion. First of all, it was noted that Benin records constant improvements in terms of ranking in the subregion, with an average growth of 50 per cent in rural areas. Speaking of the availability of the Internet, the reference is mainly focused on the availability of modern technological and telecommunications infrastructures. Several government projects are currently underway, some have been completed and are waiting for the second phase, while others are underway for the deployment of fiber optics throughout Benin.

From a statistical point of view, there was an imbalance between the number of subscribers and the coverage rate (more than 10 million subscribers against a coverage rate of 0.18%). Although Benin has a national legal framework to regulate Internet availability, including the Digital Code and ARCEP (Autorité de Régulation des Communications Électroniques et de la Poste), stakeholders are actively working to improve this regulatory framework by providing assistance and proposals.

The importance of referring to MTTR (Mean Time To Repair) was also pointed out to ideally measure Internet availability. The need for frequent and detailed reporting in order to have accurate data to improve discussions was highlighted.

This panel brings out the positive evolution of Internet availability in Benin while highlighting the challenges and opportunities that arise to continue to improve Internet access in the country.

Summary of session 2 - Keynote on Internet uses in Benin: analysis and impacts of these uses on society.

The second session was moderated by Dr. Fréjus GBAGUIDI and brought together a variety of stakeholders from academia, Internet service providers, the Ministry of Digital and Digitalization of Benin, the Agency for Information Systems and Digital (ASIN), as well as the Consumers' Association, among others.

In his keynote before the panel, Dr. Fréjus Gbaguidi highlighted that Benin has witnessed the Internet revolution over the past three decades. His presentation highlighted the negative impact of the insufficient production of digital content in Benin, the superficial nature of many uses of the Internet, while revealing the considerable untapped potential in this sector. The concern about the breakdown of trust online due to cybercrime was also addressed.

He raised points of vigilance, including the predominance of social media, which can distract Generation Z , leaving little place for physical interaction. He then broadened the reflection on ways to unlock the potential of the digital economy in Benin, including: invest in training, in particular to develop digital skills; finance innovative projects that can stimulate the creation of local content; establish advantageous taxation to encourage digital development; build trust in the digital environment, including by improving online security; and improve infrastructure to ensure reliable and fast access to the Internet.

It was stressed that such discussions should be translated into concrete proposals addressed to decision-makers, accompanied by means to implement key measures to improve the well-being of society.

Several questions allowed the moderator, Dr. Gilbert CAPO-CHICHI, to animate the debate after the presentation of the Keynote, with the participation of the panelists, including Dr. Fréjus GBAGUIDI, Ms. Rachael ORUMOR, the representative of the NGO Fondation des Jeunes Amazones du Développement (FJAD), Pr. Eugène EZIN, Director of the Institute for Research in Computer Science at the University of Abomey-Calavi, and Mr. Stéphane NEVIT.

The concerns discussed included the existence of the legal framework for digital training, the orientation on the use of social networks, the different types of Internet uses in Benin, the use of monitoring tools in Internet management, and the categories of recommended uses for the Internet.

The responses highlighted the need to raise awareness and popularize existing laws, although some are still at an embryonic stage. Awareness-raising should be adapted to different audiences to avoid undesirable effects on socio-cultural life.

It is also necessary to develop specific guidelines for the use of social networks in the Beninese context, encouraging beneficial uses for the population while taking into account motivational and censorship measures to mitigate negative effects. The notion of online freedom also needs to be re-evaluated to avoid reckless actions due to ignorance.

More than 70 per cent of cases show that Beninese users follow international trends in Internet use. It is recommended to make judicious use of the various opportunities offered by Internet providers. It is also important to teach the principles of digital identity to promote responsible use.

As for monitoring tools, they exist to monitor and improve the attendance of platforms in Benin. It is recommended to promote content adapted to Beninese society, including educational content. Parents should be made aware of filters and control tools to protect their children. It is essential to produce quality content, especially in local languages, and to set up training that takes into account the Beninese and African context.

Summary of session 3 - Keynote on government policies and infrastructures for a quality Internet, accessible to the greatest number of Beninese.

Session 3 was moderated by Mrs. Dorice DJETON GOUDOU, a journalist, media-gender consultant, president of the NGO DG PARTNERS, and PhD student in Information and Communication Sciences. Panelists who attended this session included representatives from ISOCEL Télécom (Internet Service Provider), the Vice President of the Foundation of Young Amazons for Development (FJAD-ONG), Rachael ORUMOR, Harold ADJAHO, representative of Internet Society Benin (ISOC Benin), and the representative of the Agency for Information Systems and Digital (ASIN).

The Keynote on "Government Policies and Infrastructure for a Quality Internet, accessible to the greatest number of Beninese" was presented by Mr. Laurencio A. TCHIAKPE, Project Manager at ASIN. He took stock of government policies in all vital sectors of Internet intervention, with a focus on the interconnectivity of the education sector, from secondary education to university. A total of 10 university sites were interconnected to foster national and regional knowledge sharing. It is expected that another 21 university sites will be connected in the coming years for interconnection with other universities in the sub-region. This initiative in the education sector opens up opportunities for many other areas in the future. This includes the installation of infrastructure nationwide and the challenge of managing change in government policies.

The debate then focused on accessibility to a quality Internet, addressing several key issues related to cost and quality. When it comes to affordable and accessible Internet, it is essential to consider both the cost of Internet access and the quality of service. Accessibility is not only limited to the quality of the connection, but also to the overall cost to users. It therefore becomes crucial to invest in high-quality Internet infrastructure to ensure that the Internet is accessible and affordable for all. According to the panelists, it is also necessary to take into account the different user profiles, such as entrepreneurs, students, professionals, etc., when implementing Internet accessibility policies.

At the same time, it was recognized that the cost of the Internet cannot meet the needs of entrepreneurs. The question of the terminal used to access the Internet can also influence the quality of the connection.

Summary of session 4: How to make the internet more affordable for all users anywhere in Benin?

This session was introduced by the moderator Beau-Clair Isidore VIEIRA, expert in information systems engineering and strategic alignment of information systems with organizations business processes.

It was pointed out that Internet coverage in Benin requires significant improvements.

It is imperative to build robust infrastructure and consolidate efforts to extend connectivity to the entire population. On the other hand, consumers have a share of responsibility. They must clearly express their expectations and needs to guide suppliers towards the priorities of the field.

Regarding the initiatives of the Beninese Society of Digital Infrastructures (SBIN), it was mentioned that in just two years of existence, SBIN has made significant investments, especially in mobile networks, in order to provide a quality Internet. Substantial investments are also planned to cover all departments of Benin. A densification project is currently underway to ensure full coverage of the national territory by 2026. However, it is important to note that mobile operators still have a long way to go to make the Internet truly accessible and affordable for all uses anywhere in Benin. The expectations of the participants here are also the creation of offers that take into account the profile of users, including in rural areas.

The panelists who moderated this fourth session included Mrs. Fydias SAGBOHAN, Communicator and Vice-President of the Foundation of Young Amazons for Development (FJAD-ONG) and the representative of the Beninese Internet Society (SBIN).

The Final Release

It was read and amended in plenary. The recommendations resulting from this work are included in this report.

➢ **Post-session phase**

It is dedicated to writing the final release and report of the Forum in the required formats, and their translation into English.

4. **Results**

The 12th Internet Governance Forum in Benin achieved the objectives set at the outset, both in terms of results achieved and participation. Thus:

- An inventory of the initiatives of the various actors aimed at improving Internet availability in Benin was drawn up.

- The uses of the Internet in Benin, as well as their impact on the overall development of the country, were analyzed. Solutions have been identified to improve the positive impact of these uses on each user, regardless of their location.

- The constraints related to the "affordable cost everywhere" factor of the Internet in Benin were discussed and a beginning of solution is proposed.
- Concrete and realistic solutions have been proposed to make the Internet available at an affordable cost for all types of uses, covering all inhabited areas of the national territory.

5. Participation

There are a total of 149 participants registered to participate in the 12th IGF Benin, including 104 indoors and 45 online. But effective participation is detailed through the following diagrams.

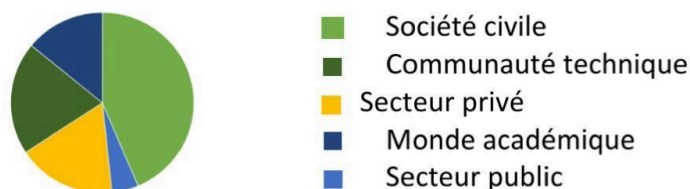*Illustration 1: Participation by Stakeholder Group*

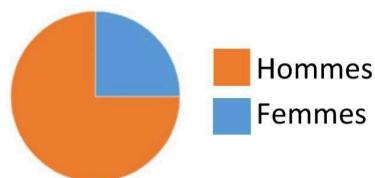*Illustration 2: Representation of attendance mode (face-to-face / online)*

Illustration 3: Gender Distribution of Participation

Recommendations

At the end of the day, the various stakeholders made recommendations. They are addressed to several actors including: the State, the private sector, the technical community, academia, users, civil society organizations, etc. These recommendations can be summarized as follows:

❖ **For the Government**

Improve coverage in rural areas : Continue initiatives to expand the availability of Internet in rural areas, including by accelerating the deployment of fiber optics.

Consider different user profiles : Consider different user profiles, such as entrepreneurs, students, professionals, etc., when implementing policies related to affordability and accessibility to the Internet.

Review the regulatory framework : Actively work to improve the national legal framework governing Internet availability, taking into account stakeholders' recommendations.

Use MTTRs for Availability Measurement : Encourage the adoption of MTTRs as key indicators to more accurately assess Internet availability in a consistent manner.

Produce regular and detailed reports : Inform the actors of the Internet ecosystem regularly through regular reports on Internet availability. This will provide accurate and up-to-date data to guide decision-making.

Promote collaboration among stakeholders : Encourage cooperation between Internet service providers, government, civil society and other stakeholders to work towards improving Internet accessibility.

Educate and Raise Awareness : Raise awareness of the importance of the Internet and its benefits while promoting the responsible and productive use of technology.

Diversify funding sources : Explore innovative financing mechanisms to support connectivity expansion projects, involving all stakeholders.

Establish regular monitoring : Implement a system of continuous monitoring of Internet availability to assess progress and make adjustments as they arise.

Reducing digital-related taxation : Review the taxation of the digital sector to make it more attractive to entrepreneurs and investors, with a view to stimulating the emergence of digital companies and startups.

Improve rural coverage : It is essential to continue efforts to achieve full coverage of the territory, especially in rural areas, by accelerating the deployment of fiber optics and other related infrastructure.

Strengthen the regulatory framework : Continue to work for the improvement of the national legal framework for the availability of the Internet. The expectations and needs of users in terms of regulation, transparency and fairness must be taken into account here.

❖ **To civil society**

Building digital trust : Train, raise awareness, educate on online security and the mechanisms of digital trust, to reduce cybercrime.

Boost collaboration of all stakeholders : Encourage active collaboration between government, industry, academia and civil society, etc., to develop solutions to the challenges of an affordable internet.

Promote the creation of local content : Train users to create content in local languages to strengthen Benin's digital identity, especially for educational purposes, while educating on the precepts of digital identity.

Turn recommendations into concrete actions : Work with all stakeholders to translate recommendations into concrete actions, and set up a mechanism to monitor and evaluate progress. This will allow the necessary adjustments to be made as we go along.

❖ **To private sector**

Work to direct the uses of social networks towards profitable objectives : Users must be educated to make social networks profitable practices, including by taking measures to mitigate their negative impacts. Awareness campaigns are also needed to promote such responsible use.

Promote the production of local content : Encourage the creation of quality digital content in local languages to raise awareness and direct uses towards topics relevant to Beninese society.

❖ **To technical community**

Improve connectivity infrastructure : Develop new infrastructure that meets international standards to ensure reliable and fast access to the Internet for all uses and in all regions of the country.

Balancing supply and demand : Explore strategies to balance subscriber numbers with coverage to ensure the Internet is accessible to more Beninese.

Stimulate collaboration : Create synergy between Internet service providers, Internet access providers, government, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to ensure Internet accessibility and affordability.

Ongoing monitoring : Establish regular monitoring of Internet availability to assess progress and adjust strategies accordingly.

❖ **For academia**

Invest in training : Mainstream science education, especially for young people, is needed to develop skills to effectively meet the needs of the growing digital economy.

Education and training : Implement training programmes to develop digital skills at the level of citizens, especially among young people, by modifying curricula to integrate local realities.

Diversification of funding sources : Explore innovative financing mechanisms involving the private sector and financing institutions to support projects to extend Internet connectivity.

7. Our sponsors

As part of the organization of the forum, the organizing committee (MAG 2023) benefited from the support of a number of organizations, including: the IGF secretary, ISOC foundation, IGFSA, JENY SAS and ISOCEL Télécoms.

8. Others partners

- Public sector partners

- Ministère du Numérique et de la Digitalisation (MND)
- Autorité de Protection des Données Personnelles (APDP)
- ASIN
- ARCEP Bénin

- Private sector partners

- ISOCEL TELECOM
- JENY SAS
- SBIN SA

- Associative Partners

- Association FGI Bénin
- Internet Society (ISOC) Benin Chapter
- IGBANET,
- ONG Women Be Free
- Fondation des Jeunes Amazones pour le Développement (FJAD-ONG)
- ABCPN

- Education sector partner

- University of Abomey-Calavi

9. Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the organizations that provided advice, technical support, financial and logistical support for the holding of this twelfth edition of the National Forum on Internet Governance in Benin:

- Le Ministère du Numérique et de la Digitalisation du Bénin (MND)
- La Coordination du Système des Nations Unies au Benin
- L'Agence des Systèmes d'Information et du Numérique (ASIN)
- L'Agence de Régulation des Communications Electroniques et de la Poste (ARCEP Bénin)
- L'Agence de Protection des données à Caractère Personnel (APDP)

- Internet Society chapitre Benin
- IGF SA
- IGF MONDE
- ONG Women Be Free
- ISOCEL Bénin
- JENY SAS
- La Société Béninoise des Infrastructures Numériques (SBIN SA(
- L'Université d'Abomey-Calavi (UAC)
- Azalaï Hôtel de la Plage de Cotonou

Our appreciation also goes to the organizing committee, MAG members, sub-committees, moderators, panelists and all participants of the 12th National Forum on Internet Governance in Benin for their availability.

10. Contacts and information sources

- Official website of Benin IGF : www.fgi.bj
- E-mail address : bureau@fgi.bj

Annexes

1.1 The event in the news

- https://fraternitebj.info/societe/article/12eme-edition-du-fgi-benin-la-disponibilite-et-l-aborda bilite-de-l-internet-au
- https://photos.app.goo.gl/ZrpFZmRCyUEU8uw26
- https://leleaderinfobenin.bj/fgi-2023-laccessibilite-de-linternet-a-cout-abordable-et-son-equit e-au-benin-au-coeur-des-echanges/
- https://www.banouto.bj/sciences-tech/article/20230912-benin-la-disponibilite-et-l-accessibilit e-d-internet-a-tous-au-coeur-d-un-forum
- https://twitter.com/yan_zountchegbe/status/1701523645091180743?t=z5owSSFSXlNrH_v3k 5fQpw&s=19
- https://www.linkedin.com/posts/yanick-zountchegbe-a284521b8_bonjour-mintch%C3%A9l %C3%A8-mieux-vaut-tard-que-activity-7107287733739343873-TrDT?utm_source=share&u tm_medium=member_android
- https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0kR4LtkeqqA7xUKb8VwMwRStveHEM t9siAVHPriRu7mazFgJEHWFkFVqhRZp1B8Bcl&id=100025566042364&mibextid=Nif5oz
- https://youtu.be/vhmmGumwbSw?si=Np5Sb5VKwMrdsUL5

1.2 Highlights in pictures

Agenda

Horaire	Sessions
08h30-09h00 (30 min)	Arrival and installation of participants and communicators
09h00-09h15 (15 min)	Welcoming address ☐ Chair MAG FGI Benin 2023
09h15-09h30 (15 min)	Opening ceremony ☐ *Chair FGI Benin / Coordonnateur Système Nations Unies / MND*
09h30-11h00 (1h30)	**Session 1 : Current state of Internet availability in Benin.** ☐ *Moderator : Dr Kossi AMESSINOU* ☐ *Panelists : MND / ARCEP / ASIN / ISOC*
Pause-café (15 min.)	
11h15-12h30 (1h15)	**Session 2 : Keynote on Internet use in Benin: analysis and impact on society** ☐ *Keynote speaker : Dr Fréjus Gbaguidi* Panel-débat : ☐ *Moderator : Mr Gilbert CAPO-CHICHI* ☐ *Panelists : ISOCEL/Femmes Codeurs/Pr EZIN (Dir. IFRI)*
12h45-14h00 (1h15)	**Session 3 : Keynote on government policies and infrastructures for a quality Internet, accessible to the greatest number of Beninese** ☐ *Keynote speaker : Mr Laurencio A. TCHIAKPE (Chef Projets ASIN)* **Panel-débat :** ☐ *Moderator : Ms Dorice DJETON GOUDOU* ☐ *Panelists : ASIN / SBIN / ARCEP / JENY SAS*
Pause-déjeuner (1h00)	
15h00-16h15 (1h15)	**Session 4 : How can we make the Internet even more affordable for all uses everywhere in Benin?** ☐ *Moderator : Mr. Beau-Clair Isidore VIEIRA* ☐ *Panelists : SBIN/ISOCEL/Association des Consommateurs, ABCPN / ONG MJAD*
16h15-16h45 (30 min)	Reading and adoption of the final statement
16h45-17h00 (15 min)	Final statement

Multi-stakeholder functional group (MAG) 2023

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