Strategic plan 2022-2025 for the West Africa Telecommunications Regulators Assembly

26 August 2022

Reference: WAGM20/CR/23/D06

Contents

Foreword

On behalf of the Conference of Regulators of the West Africa Telecommunications Regulators Assembly (WATRA), I am pleased to present our strategic plan for the period 2022-2025. This tailored plan is the outcome of extensive dialogue among our members, connecting common challenges and opportunities with the vision and mission of the Assembly. It charts our future path together and marks a milestone in our efforts to support the development of telecommunications as a way of fostering economic growth and social inclusion in our region.

This plan sets our ambition for co-operation, knowledge sharing and increased regional integration in Western Africa. Its success will require full participation by all our members, and I am confident that their commitment, in terms of the human and financial resources that are required, will allow the comprehensive implementation of this plan.

I would like to express my gratitude to all our members for sharing their views and ideas during the development of this strategic plan. Their candid opinions – both criticisms of past shortcomings and constructive ideas for improvements within the Assembly – have been invaluable in shaping this plan.

Professor Umar Danbatta
Executive Vice Chairman of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC)
Chairman of the Executive Committee and of the West Africa Telecommunications Regulators Assembly (WATRA) for 2021

Acknowledgments

This strategic plan has been developed at the initiative of the Conference of Regulators. It gives our Assembly clear direction for working together. It has been developed so that the Assembly can better serve all our members, while balancing our ambition to do more with our human and financial capacities in the short and medium term. It starts from our priorities and sets out the tasks we need to work on together to make the Assembly an effective regional organisation, helping our members to fulfil their mandate as national regulatory authorities and promoting regional harmonisation of regulation for the benefit of end users.

I would like to thank all the organisations and individuals who have contributed to the development of this strategic plan, and in particular:

- All our members, for sharing their views on what the Assembly should be doing in interviews and/or written submissions
- Other regional organisations which have shared with us in interviews what they aim to do and how they work: the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC), the Communications Regulators' Association of Southern Africa (CRASA), the East African Communications Organization (EACO), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Latin American Forum of Telecommunications Regulatory Bodies (REGULATEL)
- Other parties interviewed during the development of this plan, such as the Swedish electronic communications and postal regulator (PTS), which runs the Swedish Program for ICT in Developing Regions (SPIDER)
- The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), for funding the development of this plan
- The Autorité de Régulation des Postes et Télécommunications (ARPT) of Guinea, for the additional funding for the update of the plan
- The staff of the Secretariat, for helping to organise the interviews with our members.

I look forward to working with all our members to achieve full implementation of this plan, for the benefit of West Africa.

Aliyu Yusuf Aboki
Executive Secretary
West Africa Telecommunications Regulators Assembly (WATRA)

1 Introduction

1.1 Presentation of WATRA

In recognition of the critical role that telecommunications plays in the socio-economic development and growth of nations worldwide, the West Africa Telecommunication Regulators' Assembly (WATRA or the Assembly) was established on the initiative of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in November 2002 as the association of telecoms regulatory authorities of the ECOWAS region. The key objectives behind this initiative were to:

- support the telecoms national regulatory authorities (NRAs) in their regulatory tasks
- facilitate the harmonisation of modern legal and regulatory frameworks, striving towards an integrated telecoms market in Western Africa
- provide an avenue to share experiences and information
- develop solutions to common problems
- chart a way forward for the development and advancement of telecoms in Western Africa.

WATRA therefore represents all the telecoms NRAs in the West African sub-region. As of 2022, our organisation has 16 member countries: one from each of the 15 ECOWAS member countries and Mauritania. Our headquarters is located in Abuja, Nigeria.

WATRA is organised around three standing bodies:

- The **Conference of Regulators**, supreme decision-making body. It comprises all 16 WATRA members and is chaired by the Chairperson of the Executive Committee.

- The **Executive Committee**, intermediate decision-making body outside of the general meetings, ensures the implementation of the Assembly's policies and the achievement of its objectives. It is composed of a Chairman (who also acts as Chairperson of the Conference of Regulators), a first Vice-Chairman and a second Vice-Chairman.

- The **Secretariat**, administrative body of WATRA, which ensures the daily implementation of the objectives defined by the Conference of Regulators.

1.2 Background and objectives for this strategic planning exercise

On 10-11 March 2021, at its 18th Annual General Meeting, the Conference of Regulators made the decision to initiate a strategic planning exercise, to develop a long-term view and identify specific priorities for the organisation. The plan is intended to guide the action of the Executive Secretary throughout his mandate and set a roadmap for the expected achievements of the Assembly in the short to medium term.

This new strategic effort is also rooted in the aspiration of WATRA to clarify our mission among our members, to align perspectives and expectations, as well as to re-ignite the momentum which may have been eroded since the Assembly was first established. Ultimately, by providing clear direction and aligning expectations among our members, this strategic plan should provide a way to reinvigorate energy and reinforce engagement across all members of the Assembly.

The strategic plan set out in this document is the result of a comprehensive exercise, which has involved intense research effort as well as an extensive interview process between the Secretariat and all the members. This exercise has also included interviews with other regional bodies of telecoms regulators, as well as a review of the strategic plans of a number of regional organisations across the globe (both telecoms and non-telecoms). This process has identified common hurdles and strategic goals shared by members, as well as structural issues which are holding the Assembly back, and best practices followed by other regional regulatory authorities.

1.3 Structure of this document

The remainder of this document is organised into five sections.

- Chapter 2 explains the context for the strategic plan by presenting a macroeconomic and demographic overview of the Western African bloc. It identifies common opportunities and challenges faced by countries in our region as well as the benefits of a common approach and collaboration.

- Chapter 3 details our updated vision and mission statement, to highlight the raison d'être of the Assembly.

- Chapter 4 presents the strategic plan for 2022 to 2025, based on a set of priorities, objectives and initiatives.

- Chapter 5 details a timeline for implementation of the strategic plan over 2022 to 2025, presents indicators for monitoring, and highlights the potential risks.

- Chapter 6 provides some concluding remarks on the strategic plan.

2 Context of the strategic plan

To ensure that the strategic plan for WATRA is tailored to the specific context in which our members operate, it is important to understand the particular characteristics and specificities of our bloc. WATRA aims to gather knowledge and expertise to supports its members, which are implementing the regulation of the telecoms/ICT sector. It must therefore look into the suitability of its suggestions for the diversity of its members. Therefore, this section describes the challenges and opportunities we have identified which are shared by the members of WATRA, as well as outlining the benefits of working together and the learning opportunities that stem from the diversity of the members of the organisation.

2.1 Overview of the Western African bloc

The territory covered by our 16 members includes a population of 416 million and a land area of 6 million km^2, which represents around 33% of the population and 20% of the area of the entire African continent. However, each of these 16 markets is quite different, reflecting an array of diversity across our sub-region.

From a macroeconomic and demographic perspective, our bloc is an evolving sub-region with a wide range of characteristics. The sub-region has experienced significant demographic growth, with an average annual population growth rate of 2.6% in 2020 (from 1.1% in Cabo Verde to 3.8% in Niger), a trend which is expected to continue. This growth has been accompanied by a general increase in urbanisation and concurrent urban development. Most economies are dominated by the agricultural sector in terms of employment shares, even if the service sector is the sub-region's largest contributor to gross domestic product (GDP).

As shown in Figure 2.1 below, there are significant macroeconomic and demographic variations among member countries. Economies range from just over USD1 billion to more than USD400 billion. Moreover, country sizes and population density fluctuate noticeably, leading to a variety of economic and infrastructural challenges.
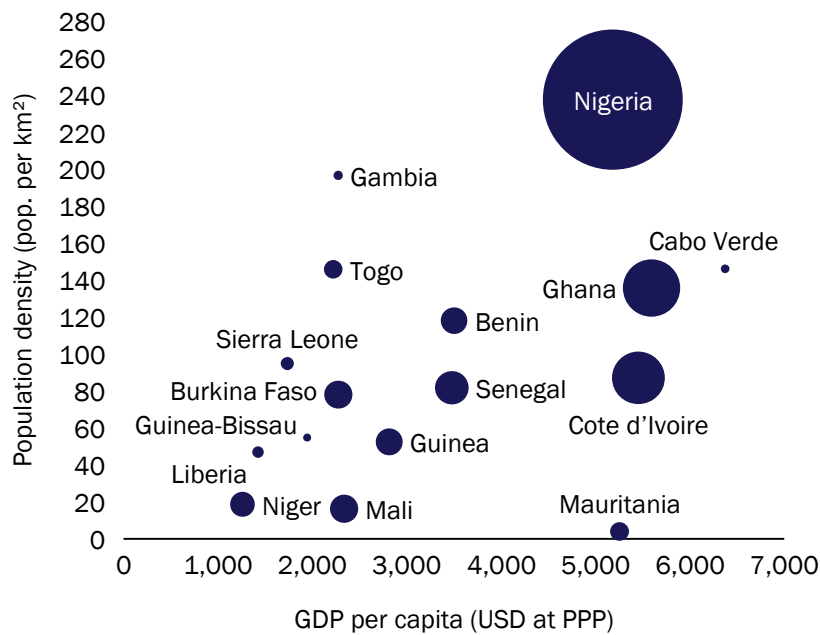
Figure 2.1: Population density, GDP per capita PPP and total GDP of WATRA members [Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators; CIA, World Factbook]

Note: The area of the bubbles is proportional to total GDP

Within the bloc, mobile technology is the most widely used way to access communications, way ahead of fixed broadband. Penetration of mobile connections is well above 100% in various countries, such as Ghana and Senegal. However, penetration of unique mobile subscribers is significantly lower throughout the sub-region (ranging from 34% in Niger to 70% in Cabo Verde), suggesting that phone ownership is concentrated among certain groups of individuals who own more than one device.

Despite general growth in demand for data coupled with increased internet usage and mobile connections, there is a digital divide within our member countries. For example, there are striking usage gaps between urban and rural areas, and a gender divide can be observed in terms of internet use. Structural issues are also creating various difficulties for our members. In particular, landlocked countries have difficulties in accessing affordable international connectivity, while countries with low population density face challenges related to the roll-out of terrestrial communication networks.

Finally, the maturity of telecoms regulation varies very significantly across our bloc. In some countries, the NRA has been in existence for many years, while in others it is still a nascent organisation. Likewise, the telecoms legal and regulatory framework is sophisticated and complex in some countries, while it is relatively simplistic in others. For instance, mobile number portability (i.e. the ability to change mobile operator while keeping the same number), typically a feature of more-sophisticated regulatory markets, is available in fewer than half of WATRA markets and the process for its implementation varies greatly.

If we wanted to look for further differences among our members, it would be possible to find more ways in which each country is unique. Despite all of these differences, we also see many common opportunities and challenges that our members are faced with, as described in the following sections.

2.2 Common opportunities

The similarities among WATRA members extend beyond cultural ties, as we are united through common opportunities from which we can all benefit.

The global trend towards digital transformation affects Western Africa and has been reinforced by the Covid-19 pandemic

On a global scale, societies, economies and governments are transforming, and undergoing a digital transformation. This digital transformation uses information and communications technology (ICT) to transform the way consumers and companies transact, the way people engage with each other, and the way governments and citizens interact all around the globe.

Our bloc is obviously affected by this global trend towards digital transformation, as evidenced by many elements of everyday life in Western Africa, including: growing internet use, rising e-commerce, online transactions, soaring online communication and entertainment.

This trend has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, with consumers, businesses and governments alike rapidly adopting new digital tools to overcome constraints induced by lockdowns and restrictions on face-to-face interaction. ICT and digital infrastructures are playing an increasingly key role in our society, having demonstrated their potential to support economic and societal development through the solutions they provide for educational use, commerce and public administrations.

Sustainability is a growing concern and ICT can play a role

Sustainability is a growing area on national strategic agendas. As stated in the United Nations' (UN's) Sustainable Development Goals, ICT can play a crucial role in accelerating the achievement of sustainability targets. ICT can support access to education through online classes and access to healthcare and mobile banking through increased access to the internet and the use of mobile apps. Moreover, ICT can deliver an energy-efficient online alternative to physical classes, meetings and shops. It is notably through building the ICT skills of the general population and inclusive network access that social developments such as digital financial inclusion can be achieved.

WATRA's desire to use ICT as a support for social sustainability is reflected through initiatives across the sub-region. For instance, ECOWAS is a partner in the UN's sustainable partnership "African Leadership in ICT for Knowledge Society Advancement".

Telecoms and ICT have shown their transformative potential in a purely African context

Telecoms and ICT are key for economic growth and societal development. The activities and initiatives already embraced by many member countries signal a commitment to these solutions. Furthermore, the sub-region has already benefited from the transformative power of ICT. For instance, several projects such as Sénèkela in Mali provide mobile services for farmers to receive weather forecasts and market price updates. The participation of most of our members in the Smart Africa Alliance is clear confirmation that such solutions will continue to be developed within our bloc.

The development of regional champions can support regional integration

WATRA's goal is to create a uniform telecoms market throughout the sub-region. To do this, it is crucial to promote policies and incentives which will provide a foundation for reducing fragmentation and fostering regional integration.

The development of regional champions will help achieve stronger cohesion. For instance, pan-West African initiatives targeting fibre network development through the region can be one step towards such regional integration, which we want to facilitate. Such fibre networks would also help landlocked country get better and/or cheaper access to submarine cables for their internet connectivity to the outside world.

Regional integration also means more seamless movement across markets, which is supported by the sub-regional mobile free roaming Regulation adopted by ECOWAS in 2017. This initiative is particularly impactful for the integration of the sub-region, given the crucial role that mobile plays due to the limited availability of fixed infrastructure and services.

2.3 Common challenges

Despite the opportunities which all of the members can benefit from, there are a number of common challenges that we must all address.

Affordability of communications services remains an issue

Telecoms service prices in the sub-region are not necessarily outliers in absolute terms compared to other parts of the world, but there is still an affordability issue. This is clearly demonstrated by measuring the prices of services as a proportion of gross national income (GNI) per capita, as shown in Figure 2.2. For the low-usage mobile basket, which only includes voice and SMS, prices range from about 2% to 32% of GNI per capita. Making services affordable is a crucial requirement, as this is the cornerstone of access to telecoms for users.

Figure 2.2: Price of low-usage mobile cellular basket (70 mins, 20 SMS) as a percentage of GNI per capita, 2020 [Source: ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators (WTI) Database 2021]
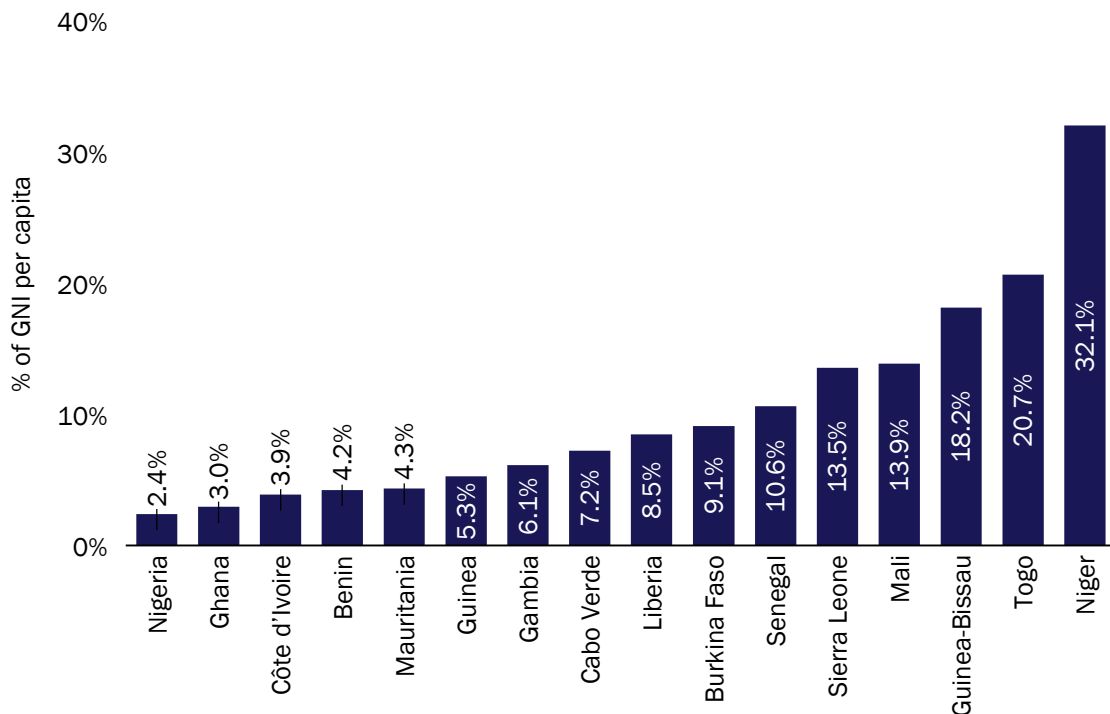
Coverage of fixed and mobile networks, as well as fibre metro/backbone networks, can be extended further

As well as ensuring that telecoms services are affordable, we also need to make these services available to the whole population of our sub-region. Overall, mobile coverage is already high among WATRA member countries (generally above 90% population coverage, and close to 100% for half of member countries). For instance, in Nigeria, the number of people without access to telecommunications services was reduced from 40 million to 25 million between 2015 and 2020. However, the coverage of mobile broadband technologies still varies widely between countries and within individual countries, and can be

particularly poor (or entirely absent) in large parts of rural areas. Current efforts for most of us are focusing on the establishment and use of Universal Service Funds (USFs). In many cases, however, these schemes have at least partly failed to meet their goals, for a variety of reasons.

Further regulation of the new digital environment requires joint efforts from NRAs and other institutions

Regulation of services of the new digital environment represents a common challenge for NRAs of the region. Services such as mobile financial service (MSF), over-the-top media service (OTT) or mobile games require appropriate regulation to ensure a healthy competitive landscape and the protection of consumers and their data. Moreover, cooperation with banks, operators and service providers is required to ensure consistency in national and regional regulation efforts and interoperability within the various services of the new digital environment.

Quality of service (QoS) often remains neglected by operators when regulatory incentives are missing or not applied

QoS represents a crucial challenge in our sub-region. Experience has shown that operators often neglect this issue in the absence of regulatory incentives to ensure they deliver a minimum QoS to end users, or when these regulatory incentives are in place but are not enforced. Several of our members have developed QoS regulation and policies, such as the NCA in Ghana which launched a monitoring programme in 2018. Some of us are also looking to go further and extend QoS to encompass the broader issue of end-to-end quality of experience (QoE).

Spectrum management and award remain critical for stimulating the mobile sector

Given the importance of this scarce resource for mobile services, spectrum management is a challenge for many of our members, to ensure the efficient use of spectrum and discourage its fraudulent use throughout the sub-region. Some of us are looking into spectrum sharing mechanisms, effective spectrum monitoring solutions and efficient spectrum allocation approaches, in line with discussions ahead of the next World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC) and associated preparatory work across bodies such as the African Telecommunications Union. It is only by providing our mobile industry with an appropriate quantity of globally harmonised spectrum that we can achieve the

economies of scale needed for affordable high-quality mobile services to emerge.

Spectrum award is also related to how spectrum is priced. This often needs to balance the supply of new spectrum that can meet operators' requirements with the expectations of our respective governments in terms of spectrum proceeds.

Managing electronic waste is a necessity and can also create new opportunities

While telecoms, and more broadly ICT, offer development opportunities for our members' markets, they also create a new challenge in terms of the waste they generate. Increasing use of electronic devices and frequent renewal of mobile equipment generates a significant amount of electronic waste (e-waste), and there is a need for urgent measures to manage this. Recycling solutions – both for batteries and whole handsets – are required, to prevent the positive potential of telecoms from coming at the expense of our sustainability principles. E-waste recycling may also provide opportunities to create jobs and set up local circular economy dynamics.

Cyber security must be strengthened to ensure availability and reliability of an infrastructure essential to the working of any digitalised country

The regional trend towards increased digitalisation and internet use also brings numerous challenges in terms of cyber security and cyber safety. At a systemic level, cyber security is becoming a central point of focus. Several WATRA members have started to look at this pressing issue, although only a handful of us have clear direct responsibility for cyber security (such as in Côte d'Ivoire).[1]

Regulation of digital platforms must be implemented so that the value they generate is shared fairly

As allowed by the globalisation largely accelerated by the development of the Internet, digital platforms juggle tax systems to maximize their profits, potentially to the detriment of local economies. Our governments do not yet measure up to the Internet giants who can offer their services in our jurisdictions without a physical presence, even if some governments have already taken initiatives to strengthen their regulatory systems. A synergy of action at the regional level through enhanced cooperation is therefore essential to deal with this new regulatory challenge which goes beyond national contexts.

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[1]   ARTCI in Côte d'Ivoire implemented Law 2017-803 which covers cyber security.

2.4 Benefits of a common approach and collaboration

Whether they are opportunities or challenges, all of the topics discussed above are faced by all Western African markets, and there is no simple one-size-fit-all approach which can be replicated from other markets. Instead, solutions tailored for the specificities of our markets generally need to be identified, designed and implemented.

We strongly believe that there are benefits to be gained if our members work together on sharing ideas, lessons and best practices in these areas, as collaboration allows to achieve better outcomes within shorter timeframes. Collaboration needs to lie at the heart of WATRA: our Assembly must provide the platform for our members to work together to exchange, discuss and resolve issues which affect all of our markets.

It is clear that our sub-region is heterogenous in many ways, with our jurisdictions varying in area, population and economic size. But this diversity has resulted in a multitude of different learning experiences and gathered knowledge, and means that a joint approach to both national and regional issues can benefit us all. It is by piecing together the knowledge and expertise of all of our members that innovative and efficient policy-making and strategy implementation will arise.

If we gather together to address common challenges and priorities, this increased co-operation will deepen our ties. Indeed, it is our goal to guide our bloc towards regional integration and harmonisation, and eventually towards a more seamless pan-regional Western African telecoms market.

3 Vision and mission statement

The vision set out below is what guides all the work carried out by the Assembly, while the mission statement details what needs to be done to achieve that vision. Both have been updated as part of this strategic plan.

3.1 Vision

To be an effective association of telecommunications/ICT regulators which actively contributes to the development of the industry, in support of the integrated social, economic, cultural and environmentally sustainable development of West Africa.

3.2 Mission statement

To constitute the main platform for collaboration, experiences and information sharing, and joint problem solving for telecommunications/ICT regulators in West Africa, in order to facilitate and promote harmonised telecommunications/ICT regulation in our sub-region, sustain the development of the industry, make services more accessible and more affordable, and contribute to the advancement of the information society and the digital economy for the benefit of all.

4 Strategic plan: priorities, objectives and initiatives

In line with our vision and mission statement, considering the context of our geographical bloc and WATRA's aspirations, we have identified **three strategic priorities as the driving forces for developing the Assembly's strategic plan:**

1. **Review the institutional and governance framework of WATRA**
2. **Promote the development of telecoms/ICT infrastructure, products and services and their usage**
3. **Harmonise the regulation of telecoms/ICT with a view to a common market in Western Africa and promote cooperation**

A number of strategic objectives stem from each of these priorities, objectives which can be met through the implementation of initiatives. An overview of these three levels is presented in Figure 4.1.

In this section we present the strategic priorities, strategic objectives and initiatives which together make up our strategic plan. For each initiative, a list of tasks is indicated, as well as the task lead and their approximate duration.

Figure 4.1: Overview of WATRA's priorities, objectives and initiatives

Review the institutional and governance framework of WATRA	Promote the development of telecoms/ICT infrastructure, products and services and their usage	Harmonise the regulation of telecoms/ICT with a view to a common market in Western Africa and promote cooperation

Review the institutional and governance framework of WATRA

- Strengthen WATRA's institutional structure
  - Redefine WATRA's role
  - Update WATRA's constitution
  - Strengthen the institutional framework and governance
  - Revisit the communication strategy

- Establish a governance framework to stimulate members' engagement
  - Clarify the role of the Secretariat as a co-ordination structure
  - Establish multi-layered involvement to foster increased participation by each WATRA member
  - Engage proactively with ECOWAS through enhanced communication and collaboration

- Stimulate interest from other stakeholders
  - Approach international donors
  - Engage with the private sector for further collaboration

Promote the development of telecoms/ICT infrastructure, products and services and their usage

- Promote access to telecommunications/ICT infrastructure, products and services
  - Increase coverage in rural and isolated areas
  - Make telecoms/ICT services affordable (particularly broadband)
  - Promote the development of telecoms/ICT services, including local content services

- Promote telecoms/ICT usage and empower end users
  - Assess and enact norms and tools to measure and improve the quality of service (QoS) and quality of experience (QoE) of communications services
  - Encourage ICT literacy and e-government programmes
  - Enact measures that empower end users

- Promote regional integration
  - Support the implementation of the ECOWAS regional roaming
  - Encourage and facilitate the interconnection of networks across Western Africa

Harmonise the regulation of telecoms/ICT with a view to a common market in Western Africa and promote cooperation

- Set up a common regulation framework
  - Establish working groups led by members to collaborate on regulatory issues
  - Develop case studies and guidelines to present the benefits and process for implementing new regulatory measures

- Co-ordinate knowledge and experience sharing
  - Organise workshops and other ways to share knowledge and experience
  - Create a database of experts within WATRA

- Become a reference on telecommunications/ICT regulation in West Africa
  - Collect and publish telecommunications data/benchmarks regarding member countries

4.1 Strategic priority 1: Review the institutional and governance framework of WATRA

Our first strategic priority focuses on the crucial need to review WATRA's institutional structure, in order to clarify the responsibilities of its component bodies (Conference of Regulators, Executive Committee, Secretariat) and to highlight the importance of WATRA members and their contributions in the context of the interactions with external stakeholders.

4.1.1 Strategic objective 1.1: Strengthen WATRA's institutional structure

Initiative 1.1.1: Redefine WATRA's role

Through this strategic plan, we wish to redefine the role of WATRA in line with its updated vision and mission statement, as well as assess the implications for our branding. This may include:

- Reconsidering the dues from members to the budget of the Assembly in order to fully achieve the objectives of this plan
- Considering a rebranding of the organisation, as other regional regulatory authorities have done (for example, the European Regulators Group (ERG) became the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC)).

We believe there needs to be alignment between the Assembly's budget, its role and the expectations that our members have of the Assembly. A rebranding may also help to reset internal and external perceptions of the organisation, which could assist in its re-launch as a full-fledged regional body of regulators.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Indicative duration
Redefine WATRA's role, in line with the other strategic objectives presented in this plan	Conference of Regulators	Two months
Consider a re-branding of the organisation	Secretariat	Two months

Initiative 1.1.2: Update WATRA's constitution

WATRA's constitution, written in 2002 shortly before establishment of the Assembly, states that our members are "conscious of the fact that the rapid transformation of the telecommunications industry […] has all but rendered traditional regulatory norms and models obsolete, making it imperative that new models be evolved".[2] If anything, the pace of change in the industry has increased further over the past 20 years. We therefore believe that we should update the Assembly's constitution, to equip it to address the telecoms market challenges of today and tomorrow, in line with its redefined role.

The drafting of this updated constitution will be co-ordinated by the Secretariat, with assistance from the legal teams of some of WATRA's members and/or external lawyers. The updated constitution will then need to be approved by a unanimous vote of our members in the course of 2022.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Update the constitution taking into account the evolutions of the telecoms industry and its regulation, and WATRA's redefined role (and potentially new name)	Executive Committee/ Secretariat	Six months
Ratify the updated constitution in a vote of members	Conference of Regulators	Three months

Initiative 1.1.3: Strengthen the institutional framework and governance

Our various bodies need to have clear processes and procedures which unambiguously rule their operations, beyond the existing simplistic documentation. Where documents specifying these processes and procedures do not already exist, they shall be written by the Secretariat, with support from our members (e.g. using relevant materials each member may have produced for its own organisation). Process and procedure documents to be developed may include:

- operational guidelines
- a corporate governance charter

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[2]   Preamble to the Constitution.

- financial regulations
- an internal audit charter
- a code of ethics
- an internal procedure code
- a risk map
- an organizational chart
- a staff performance and evaluation sheet
- a continuity plan
- a communications policy
- an IT policy
- a recruitment policy.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Develop new process/procedure documents - and update existing ones, where applicable	Secretariat/ Executive Committee	Nine months (strengthening of the institutional and governance framework is completed when the constitution is also updated in the previous initiative)

Initiative 1.1.4: Revisit the communication strategy

The Assembly needs to update and revisit its strategy for communicating with internal and external stakeholders, with a particular focus on online content and online communication. Our website is currently being redesigned so that it can display relevant content to members and third parties, such as recent activity by the Assembly and its future working groups, statistics on the telecoms sector in members' countries, and training material – with some content only accessible to members and other material available to a wider audience.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Complete the redesign of the website	Secretariat	Two months
Ensure the website displays relevant content for members and external stakeholders	Secretariat	Ongoing

4.1.2 Strategic objective 1.2: Establish a governance framework to stimulate members' engagement

Initiative 1.2.1: Clarify the role of the Secretariat as a co-ordination structure

The Secretariat of our organisation is a small structure of fewer than five people.

In contrast, the Assembly encompasses the collective forces and resources of all of our 16 members, which can be harnessed to create successful and useful outcomes for all members.

As such, the role of Secretariat should be focused on increasing the involvement of our members in the collaborative development of content and the joint execution of initiatives, rather than on carrying out all the work of the Assembly itself. Consequently, the Secretariat should evolve towards a co-ordination structure, in charge, among other things, of:

- Channelling the involvement of members, particularly in working groups (to be established)
- Collecting and providing to members relevant data (benchmarking of telecoms indicators, progress tracking of various initiatives, etc.)
- Organising workshops and overseeing the logistical aspects of workshops attended by members' staff.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Work with members to establish working groups (see Strategic	Secretariat	Four months

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
objective 3.1) on each relevant topic (see Strategic objectives 2 and 3)		
Establish a mechanism for the collection of relevant data (see Strategic Objective 3.3)	Relevant working group	Six months
Create a Project Manager position responsible for coordinating technical and logistical aspects of working groups	Secretariat	Three months and then, ongoing

Initiative 1.2.2: Establish multi-layered involvement to foster increased participation by each WATRA member

Each of our members needs to be fully involved in the work of the Assembly if it is to produce meaningful outputs that support WATRA's regulatory activity in each of our countries. To achieve this there must be effective support at every level of our organisations, starting from the senior leadership of each member NRA and cascading down each NRA's hierarchy, in such a way that participation in Assembly activities by individuals from the NRAs is appreciated and recognised by the leadership of each NRA.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Obtain formal commitment to this new approach from the senior leadership of each NRA	Conference of Regulators	One month
Formulate suggestions to create a reward framework for individuals actively involved in producing content as part of the working groups	Secretariat	Three months
Give a "top-down" push within each NRA requesting an increased involvement in the work of the Assembly	Senior leadership of each NRA	One month

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Share updates on the work produced by each working group	Each working group	Ongoing

Initiative 1.2.3: Engage proactively with ECOWAS through enhanced communication and collaboration

ECOWAS and WATRA have very similar geographical areas of interest. The ECOWAS Commission published its telecoms/ICT strategy in 2017[3] and our Assembly is publishing its strategy in 2022. The Assembly and ECOWAS need to collaborate more effectively, through information exchange and ideally joint initiatives, to support development of the industry for the benefit of end users and the economy of Western Africa. The Assembly will work for its recognition as an official advisory structure of ECOWAS in the field of telecommunications, while maintaining its independence, as does BEREC with the European Commission.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Add to the Constitution and formalise with an MoU the collaboration with ECOWAS, and become its official advisory organisation in the field of telecommunications/ICT	Secretariat	Four months
Collaborate with ECOWAS in relation to telecoms/ICT, through regular interactions, and act as a relay for ECOWAS to support the process of implementing sub-regional telecommunications/ICT policies and directives	Secretariat	Ongoing

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[3] Development of a telecommunication / ICT development strategy in the ECOWAS region for the 2018-2023 period.

4.1.3 Strategic objective 1.3: Stimulate interest from other stakeholders

Initiative 1.3.1: Approach international donors

The Assembly will need to identify and approach international donors (e.g. ITU, SMART AFRICA, World Bank, IMF, BCEAO, ECOWAS, EU, SPIDER, African Development Bank, etc.) for funding, to help pay for more-extensive staffing of the Secretariat. To support its approach to potential donors, we will be able to rely on the content of the redesigned website (see Initiative 1.1.4) showcasing our work, and on this strategic plan setting out our objectives.

This initiative will not be implemented as a replacement for membership dues but rather in addition to them.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Identify potential international donors	Secretariat	One month
Approach international donors to present WATRA's work and its impact on development goals	Secretariat	Ongoing

Initiative 1.3.2: Engage with the private sector for further collaboration

At the same time as we approach international donors, we should make presentations to private companies (operators, ISPs and equipment vendors) on the benefits of participating in our activities. These benefits include:

• Making their voices heard within an active regional forum on telecommunications/ICT
• Helping to shape a harmonised regulation across West Africa (as detailed in Section 4.3.1), which would facilitate the work of companies present in multiple WATRA member countries.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Reach out and present to private companies (operators, ISPs and	Secretariat	Ongoing

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
vendors) on the benefits of collaborating with the Assembly, with the goal of creating partnerships		

4.2 Strategic priority 2: Promote the development of telecoms/ICT infrastructure, products and services and their usage

This second strategy priority for our Assembly is to promote the development of telecoms infrastructure, products and services and their usage throughout West Africa by supporting NRAs of the region in their efforts. We believe this will deliver benefits in terms of advances in the information society and the digital economy, and thus will support social, economic, cultural and environmentally sustainable development for everyone in the sub-region.

4.2.1 Strategic objective 2.1: Promote access to telecoms/ICT infrastructure, products and services

Widespread, ideally universal, access to high-quality telecoms/ICT products and services is an objective of WATRA's members, and forms part of our remit as national telecoms regulators. WATRA will have to put in place a framework for reflection and cooperation between its members to support a process of developing a common strategy (see Strategic Priority 3) and the definition of major axes allowing each member to improve access to telecoms/ICT infrastructure, products and services.

Initiative 2.1.1: Increase coverage in rural and isolated areas

Although mobile coverage is generally high in WATRA members' countries, this is not the case everywhere, as 3G coverage is incomplete and 4G coverage is limited. This means that various areas, especially in less urban parts of our countries, have no access to mobile broadband coverage or may lack mobile coverage altogether.

Our members will continue to work with operators and governments to increase rural coverage, by assessing the barriers to be overcome and the solutions that may be implemented. Potential approaches for extending rural coverage include:

- Incorporating coverage obligations in licence awards and/or renewals

- Strengthening Universal Service Fund mechanisms
- Investigating the feasibility of introducing tax incentives or government support linked to rural coverage improvements
- Facilitating national roaming agreements to share the cost of rural coverage between operators
- Streamlining the civil engineering processes for deployment of telecoms/ICT network infrastructure (urban planning rules, wayleave agreements, etc.).

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Assess the barriers to improved rural coverage	Relevant working group	Six months
Propose a comprehensive list of potential solutions to overcome these barriers	Relevant working group	Six months
Track the solutions implemented in each member's country and the progress of rural coverage, through the related working group	Secretariat	Ongoing

Initiative 2.1.2: Make telecoms/ICT services more affordable (particularly broadband)

The lack of affordability is a key factor restricting access to telecoms/ICT services in the sub-region. Several solutions aimed at increasing rural coverage relate to reducing network costs (such as national roaming agreements, infrastructure sharing and streamlined civil engineering processes), and may also improve service affordability. However, other solutions (such as coverage obligations and increased universal service contributions) increase the costs borne by operators and may have a detrimental impact on service affordability. Fair, healthy and sustained competition is also generally an effective market-led approach to ensuring services remain affordable. Our mission is, and will be, to ensure the regulatory framework is conducive to making services always more affordable while balancing with other interests and objectives.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Assess the barriers to affordability, in conjunction with barriers to coverage	Relevant working group	Six months
Propose potential solutions to address these barriers, in conjunction or separately with barriers to coverage	Relevant working group	Six months
Track the solutions recommended and implemented in each member country and the progress of affordability of telecoms/ICT services, through the related working group	Secretariat	Ongoing

Initiative 2.1.3: Promote the development of telecoms/ICT services, including local content services

Current telecommunications/ICT services, as well as the content these services give access to, are not necessarily adapted to the peoples of West Africa. Various reasons can explain this situation, and in particular the existence of numerous local languages, the illiteracy which still affects a significant part of our countries, and the prominence of content developed for the North American and European markets on international platforms. We will work to identify the obstacles to the emergence of local services and local content, and to identify the incentives that can be implemented to stimulate their development.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Assess the constraints to the development of local services and content	Relevant working group	Six months
Propose potential solutions to address these barriers	Relevant working group	Six months

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Monitor the solutions implemented in each member country and the development of offers of local content, through the relevant working group	Secretariat	Ongoing

4.2.2 Strategic objective 2.2: Promote telecoms/ICT usage and empower end users

Promoting telecoms/ICT usage contributes to reaping the full benefits of advances in the information society and the digital economy. Protecting end users is a direct responsibility of any regulator. As such, WATRA members are working towards these objectives, and we will continue to do so.

Initiative 2.2.1: Assess and enact norms and tools to measure and improve the quality of service (QoS) and quality of experience (QoE) of communications services

End users are more likely to make use of telecoms/ICT products and services if they work reliably and are practical to use. This means that the services provided should be of high (or at least sufficient) quality, which can be measured using technical parameters (for QoS) or through user perceptions (for QoE). This is why many of us are developing QoS/QoE policies or regulations to ensure that telecoms operators meet a minimum level of network quality. As part of this exercise, typical questions include:

- What indicators should be measured?
- How can they be measured?
- What sanctions should be imposed if obligations are not met?

The answers differ based on the specific local circumstances – from network situation to enforcement powers or mandate.

We should continue to work on improving QoS and QoE, through developing, implementing and updating appropriately regulations and possibly also through deployment of our own measurement capabilities where applicable.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Assess and qualify the QoS and QoE issues	Relevant working group	Six months
Propose a comprehensive list of methods and approaches to enhance QoS/QoE in various situations	Relevant working group	Six months
Track the evolution of the QoS/QoE frameworks in each member's country and their progress over time, through the related working group	Secretariat	Ongoing

Initiative 2.2.2: Encourage ICT literacy and e-government programmes

We will support ICT literacy and e-government initiatives throughout Western Africa, as these directly influence the usage of telecoms services. Given the importance of ICT literacy and e-government services for our societies and economies which are going through digitalisation, our role should be to ensure that telecoms services meet the standards required to allow these initiatives to be successful, as described in Initiative 2.2.1 directly above.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Reiterate that WATRA and regulators will support ICT literacy and e-government programmes, in the context of the promotion of ICT	Conference of Regulators	Ongoing
Monitor ICT literacy and e-government programmes in each member's country	Relevant working group	Ongoing
Track ICT literacy and e-government programmes in each member's country, through the related working group	Secretariat	Ongoing

Initiative 2.2.3: Enact measures that empower end users

Various measures can be implemented to empower end users. These often involve making it easier for end users to switch service provider (so they can fully benefit from the competing offers available in their home market), and lowering the network effects (i.e. the benefits gained from buying services from the same provider as other customers, rather than from a competitor). The kinds of measures which might be considered here include:

- Encouraging or even enforcing the interoperability of mobile wallets, so that payments which are transferred from one provider to another can remain in the mobile money system, rather than having to be converted to cash
- Lowering (mobile and fixed) termination rates, so that the price of off-net calls can be the same as the price of on-net calls, and users do not need to own several SIMs to enjoy more affordable tariffs within each mobile network, nationally and regionally.
- Considering the Implementation of mobile number portability, i.e. the ability to change mobile operator while keeping the same number

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Identify and assess the measures that empower end users	Relevant working group	Six months
Propose how these measures can be implemented. This could include case studies from members that have already implemented such measures (champions and leading strategies)	Relevant working group	Six months
Track the solutions implemented in each member's country and their progress over time, through the related working group	Secretariat	Ongoing

4.2.3 Strategic objective 2.3: Promote regional integration

Further than national improvements, our aim is to promote regional integration of telecoms services and infrastructure, and strive towards a unified Western African telecoms market.

Initiative 2.3.1: Support implementation of the ECOWAS regional roaming

On 28 November 2016, five members of WATRA signed the Abidjan Protocol implementing free roaming between their countries: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali and Senegal. On 16 December 2017, the Council of Ministers of ECOWAS enacted Regulation C/REG 21/12/17 on 'Roaming on Public Mobile Communications Networks in the ECOWAS Region', extending free roaming to all ECOWAS member states. The 2017 Regulation indicated in particular that:

- "Member States shall comply with this Regulation within their territory and shall provide the public with updated and easily accessible information concerning implementation of the Regulation."[4]
- "National regulatory agencies shall be responsible for [...] forward[ing] to ECOWAS Commission up-to-date information on the implementation of this Regulation."[5]
- "Roaming providers shall sign roaming agreements in conformity with this Regulation and shall implement same no later than 31 May 2018".[6]

However, at the time of writing this report the above Regulation had still not been fully implemented across the ECOWAS region.

The members of WATRA will continue to work with operators and governments to ensure the full implementation of the community roaming in line with the enforcement of the ECOWAS Regulation.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Continue discussions with regulators in countries where it is not yet implemented, to ensure swift implementation across the sub-region	Secretariat/ Focal points	Until implemented in all member countries
Ensure a strong involvement of the presidents and general managers	Secretariat/ Focal points	Until full implementation by all members

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[4]   Article 14.

[5]   Article 15.

[6]   Article 22.

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
of the regulators for a complete implementation of the Regulation		
Strictly apply the various Resolutions taken as part of the implementation of community roaming and review the community roaming coordination office	Secretariat/ Focal points	30 June 2022
Adopt measures to sanction failures to implement the Regulation	Secretariat/ Focal points	30 September 2022
Revise the Regulations to correct shortcomings in its implementation	Secretariat/ Focal points/ ECOWAS	30 September 2022

Initiative 2.3.2: Encourage and facilitate the interconnection of networks across Western Africa

In most countries around the world, not just in Western Africa, telecoms networks were traditionally deployed and run as state-owned monopolies. Liberalisation and/or privatisation from the 1980s (or later in our sub-region) did not significantly alter the national logic of telecoms networks, as the relevant legal frameworks remained national (e.g. the licences needed to offer telecoms services, spectrum awards, numbering plans, etc.). Development of the internet has increased the importance of international interconnection, and led to the roll-out of a large number of submarine cables around the world. In Western Africa, all non-landlocked WATRA members' countries are connected to a least one submarine cable, and up to six for Nigeria (with more due to come into service in 2022 and 2023). However, terrestrial interconnection with fibre backbone across the sub-region has not evolved at a similar pace. WATRA members want to encourage and facilitate the interconnection of networks across West Africa, by:

- Mapping current fibre backbones, building on documentation that already exists[7]
- Identifying missing international corridors that would link large population centres to each other and/or to an internet exchange point (IXP), and

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[7]   Such as efforts from the World Bank, presented at https://blogs.worldbank.org/digital-development/africas-connectivity-gap-can-map-tell-story

therefore where the installation of a fibre backbone could bring significant economic benefits through increased international connectivity and trade.

▶ *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Conduct high-level mapping of current and planned fibre backbones and other regionally-significant network infrastructures	Relevant working group	Six months
Identify missing international corridors and schemes to foster increased interconnection of networks	Relevant working group	Three months
Ensure the implementation of regulation on the interconnection of networks across West Africa and follow its progress over time, through the related working group	Secretariat/ECOWAS	Ongoing

4.3 Strategic priority 3: Harmonise the regulation of telecoms/ICT with a view to a common market in Western Africa and promote cooperation

This third strategy priority for the members of our Assembly is to harmonise the regulation of telecoms in Western Africa and strengthen cooperation to facilitate the emergence of a common telecoms market, in support of cross-border economic development.

4.3.1 Strategic objective 3.1: Set up a common regulation framework

Initiative 3.1.1: Establish working groups led by members to collaborate on regulatory issues

As presented in Initiative 1.2.1, the Secretariat should evolve towards a co-ordination structure, focusing on increasing the role of our members. It will therefore be essential to the functioning of the Assembly that members carry out the bulk of the work within the working groups that are to be established.

These working groups will be created to collaborate on regulatory issues, and will be led by our members. Each working group should focus on a clearly defined topic (e.g. rural coverage or 5G) and be attended by a significant number of members to ensure it reflects the priorities of a large part (if not all) of the Assembly. To ensure that the work of each working group is in line with widely shared priorities of Assembly members each group will be chaired by two members (i.e. co-chairs), to balance interests and share workload.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Identify areas of focus and establish a working group for each of them	Secretariat	Six months
Set up a yearly work programme	Each working group	One month each year
Report back on the findings and output of the working group, to share content with all members at least on a yearly basis	Each working group	N/A

Initiative 3.1.2: Develop case studies and guidelines to present the benefits and process for implementing new regulatory measures

The outputs of working groups should include case studies to present the benefits and process for implementing new regulatory measures to all members. Such case studies will need to be detailed enough to be easily understood by members of the Assembly outside the working group, so that they can weigh up the pros and cons of a measure. The case studies should also contain guidelines on the process for implementation, so that if a member decides to implement the measure described, it has the tools to do so, and the guidelines must be adaptable to be adjusted to the national context of each member. In particular, where one or more members of the Assembly have already implemented a measure, the case study should explain how it was implemented and set out the observed benefits.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Develop material (case studies, guidelines, recommendations, etc.)	Each working group	N/A
Present prepared material to members outside the working group at workshops	Each working group	0.5 to 2 days

4.3.2 Strategic objective 3.2: Co-ordinate knowledge and experience sharing

Initiative 3.2.1: Organise workshops and other ways to share knowledge and experience

In addition to working groups and the material they will produce, existing knowledge needs to be shared more widely among our members. Some WATRA members have looked into a number of regulatory issues and are likely to be at the forefront of development of regulation in the sub-region on some topics. This experience will be useful for other members and needs to be communicated to them, so that they can draw on our collective knowledge and develop skills on other topics.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Identify champions and leading strategies in each area	Each working group	One month after the formation of the working group
Organise knowledge-sharing workshops, where champions can share experience and insights with other working group members	Each working group	N/A
Publish the content of the workshops, and any associated documentation, on a members-only section of WATRA's website	Each working group	Within two weeks after each workshop

Initiative 3.2.2: Create a database of experts within WATRA

Another way to share knowledge within WATRA will be to create a database of experts among the staff of each member, with their area of expertise. When a member works on a subject for which he considers that external support could prove useful, he will be able to contact the experts on this subject from other members and benefit from their support.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Establish a database of experts among the staff of each member	Relevant working group	Three months after the creation of the working group
Publish this database in the members-only section of the WATRA website	Secretariat	Ongoing

4.3.3 Strategic objective 3.3: Become a reference on telecoms/ICT regulation in West Africa

Initiative 3.3.1: Collect and publish telecoms data/benchmarks regarding member countries

Currently, when conducting research or benchmarking activities on the state of telecoms in West Africa, our members have to use third-party sources and databases and/or carry out their own research. In future, we will set up a working group composed of all members, with responsibility for collecting data from each of us and compiling it into benchmarks, datasets and/or reports. This will ensure that research on the regulatory situation in our markets is more easily accessible by all WATRA members.

► *Tasks*

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
Identify the indicators that need to be reported by each member, and	Relevant working group	Six months

Task	Task owner	Approximate duration
create a single template to collect them (to be sent to all members)		
Follow up the replies from each member to ensure timeliness and completeness of answers	Relevant working group	After each data collection request has been sent and until it is returned by all members
Publish these indicators on WATRA's website in relevant sections (members-only or public)	Secretariat	At least one publication a year

Reference: WAGM20/CR/23/D06

5 Implementation timeline and risks

All of the initiatives set out in this strategic plan can be achieved within the 2022–2025 timeframe. This section presents a timeline indicating when each initiative should start and be completed, as well as identifying the risks to a successful implementation.

5.1 Timeline

Figure 5.1 overleaf presents a timeline of initiatives included in the strategic plan, and indicates how some of the initiatives (or at least particular tasks involved in some of them) need to be implemented before others can start.

The different colours used on the timeline have the following meaning:

Initial tasks of an initiative

Ongoing task, starting immediately after the initial task(s) of the corresponding initiative have been achieved

Recurring tasks, such as the delivery of a knowledge sharing workshop

Figure 5.1: Implementation timeline for the strategic plan

		2022				2023				2024				2025			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4

1 Review the institutional and governance framework of WATRA

1.1 Strengthen WATRA's institutional structure
- **1.1.1** Redefine WATRA's role
- **1.1.2** Update WATRA's constitution
- **1.1.3** Strengthen the institutional framework and governance
- **1.1.4** Revisit the communication strategy

1.2 Establish a governance framework to stimulate members' engagement
- **1.2.1** Clarify the role of the Secretariat as a co-ordination structure
- **1.2.2** Establish multi-layered involvement to foster increased participation by each WATRA member
- **1.2.3** Engage proactively with ECOWAS through enhanced communication and collaboration

1.3 Stimulate interest from other stakeholders
- **1.3.1** Approach international donors
- **1.3.2** Engage with the private sector for further collaboration

2 Promote the development of telecoms/ICT infrastructure, products and services and their usage

2.1 Promote access to telecommunications/ICT infrastructure, products and services
- **2.1.1** Increase coverage in rural and isolated areas
- **2.1.2** Make telecoms/ICT services affordable (particularly broadband))
- **2.1.3** Promote the development of telecoms/ICT services, including local content services

2.2 Promote telecommunications/ICT usage and empower end users
- **2.2.1** Assess and enact norms and tools to measure and improve the QoS and QoE
- **2.2.2** Encourage ICT literacy and e-government programmes
- **2.2.3** Enact measures that empower end users

2.3 Promote regional integration
- **2.3.1** Support the implementation of the ECOWAS regional roaming
- **2.3.2** Encourage and facilitate the interconnection of networks across Western Africa

3 Harmonise the regulation of telecoms/ICT with a view to a common market in Western Africa and promote cooperation

3.1 Set up a common regulation framework
- **3.1.1** Establish working groups led by members to collaborate on regulatory issues
- **3.1.2** Develop case studies and guidelines to present the benefits and process for implementing new regulatory measures

3.2 Co-ordinate knowledge and experience sharing
- **3.2.1** Organise workshops and other ways to share knowledge and experiences
- **3.2.2** Create a database of experts within WATRA

3.3 Become a reference on telecommunications/ICT regulation in West Africa
- **3.3.1** Collect and publish telecommunications data/benchmarks regarding member countries

5.2 Monitoring indicators

The implementation of the strategic plan is structured around strategic priorities, objectives, and initiatives. This subsection presents sets of monitoring indicators to assess the successful implementation of each strategic initiative.

Initiative	Monitoring indicators
STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: Review the institutional and governance framework of WATRA	
Strategic objective 1.1: Strengthen WATRA's institutional structure	
1.1.1.: Redefine WATRA's role	- New definition of WATRA's role is drafted - Number of members approving the new role
1.1.2.: Update WATRA's constitution	- The constitution is updated - Number of members approving the updated constitution
1.1.3.: Strengthen the institutional framework and governance	- Existing process and procedure documents are updated - New complementing documents are drafted - Number of members approving the updated and new documents
1.1.4.: Revisit the communication strategy	- Completion of the website's redesign - Number of members assessing the content of the website as relevant
Strategic objective 1.2.: Establish a governance framework to stimulate members' engagement	
1.2.1.: Clarify the role of the secretariat as a co-ordination structure	- Define the positions and role of each employee of the secretariat - Number of members approving the clarified roles of the secretariat

Initiative	Monitoring indicators
1.2.2.: Establish multi-layered involvement to foster increased participation by each WATRA member	- Formal commitment of members to WATRA's new approach - A reward framework for involvement is set up - The senior leadership of each NRAs is implementing a "top-down" push for the involvement of its employees in the work of WATRA
1.2.3.: Engage proactively with ECOWAS through enhanced communication and collaboration	- Regularity of interactions with ECOWAS - Number and/or width of collaboration for joint projects with ECOWAS
Strategic objective 1.3.: Stimulate interest from other stakeholders	
1.3.1.: Approach international donors	- Number of approached international donors
1.3.2. Engage with the private sector for further collaboration	- Numbers of contacted private sector actors (these must include at least the main operators in each Member Country)
STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: Promote the development of telecoms/ICT infrastructure, products and services and their usage	
Strategic objective 2.1.: Promote access to telecoms/ICT infrastructure, products and services	
Initiative 2.1.1.: Increase coverage in rural and isolated areas	- Percentage of total population without access to telecommunications services (for both voice and data services)
Initiative 2.1.2.: Make telecoms/ICT services more affordable (particularly broadband)	- Low-usage mobile cellular basket (70 mins, 20 SMS) as a percentage of GNI per capita - Number of Member Countries having affordability policies in place
Initiative 2.1.3.: Promote the development of telecoms/ICT services, including local content services	- Prominence of local platforms and contents among West African telecoms/ICT users: number of local platforms with more than 20

Initiative	Monitoring indicators
	million users (about 5% of the population of WATRA member countries), proportion of audiovisual most popular contents produced locally - Take-up of more advanced services such as mobile broadband
Strategic objective 2.2.: Promote telecoms/ICT usage and empower end users	
Initiative 2.2.1.: Assess and enact norms and tools to measure and improve the quality of service (QoS) and quality of experience (QoE) of communications services	- Numbers of countries where QoS and QoE are measured efficiently (e.g. drive and walk tests) - Number of countries with regulatory requirements ensuring that the indicators measured are improving
Initiative 2.2.2.: Encourage ICT literacy and e-government programmes	- Number of members with ICT literacy and e-government programmes - Percentage of internet users in total population - Population's level of ICT skills (e.g. as assessed by DESI Individual Indicators8) - Range of services offered online by West African governments
Initiative 2.2.3.: Enact measures that empower end users	- Number of members which have implemented a process which facilitates the switching of service provider (including with measures such as mobile number portability) - Number of members which address credits being lost by end-users (e.g. via a minimum duration of validity for pre-paid top-ups)
Strategic objective 2.3.: Promote regional integration	
Initiative 2.3.1.: Support implementation of the ECOWAS regional roaming	- Number of countries in which the ECOWAS regional roaming is fully effective

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[8] https://digital-agenda-data.eu/datasets/desi/indicators

Initiative	Monitoring indicators
Initiative 2.3.2.: Encourage and facilitate the interconnection of networks across Western Africa	- Number of backbone links interconnecting member countries
STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: Harmonise the regulation of telecoms/ICT with a view to a common market in Western Africa and promote cooperation	
Strategic objective 3.1.: Set up a common regulation framework	
Initiative 3.1.1.: Establish working groups led by members to collaborate on ongoing and new regulatory issues	- Creation of working groups for each of the identified relevant topics - Proportion of working groups having regular meetings - Proportion of working groups delivering reports
Initiative 3.1.2.: Develop case studies and guidelines that can be used to present the benefits and process for implementing new regulatory measures	- Proportion of working groups developing case studies and guidelines to support the implementation of new regulatory measures - Availability of these case studies and guidelines to all Members on WATRA's website
Strategic objective 3.2: Co-ordinate knowledge and experience sharing	
Initiative 3.2.1.: Organise workshops and other ways to share knowledge and experiences	- Proportion of working groups which organise at least a yearly knowledge-sharing session - Perceived knowledge by members (e.g. monitored via surveys sent following knowledge-sharing sessions)
Initiative 3.2.2.: Create a database of experts within WATRA	- Creation of a database and its publication on WATRA's website
Strategic objective 3.3: Become a reference on telecoms/ICT regulation in West Africa	

Initiative	Monitoring indicators
Initiative 3.3.1.: Collect and publish telecoms data/benchmarks regarding member countries	- Number of countries with information (trade regulations, documents) uploaded on WATRA's website - Frequency of updates of published information

5.3 Risks

The successful implementation of this strategic plan relies on the involvement of all parties: Assembly members, the Conference of Regulators, the Executive Committee, the working groups and the secretariat. However, there are also other elements that need to fall into place in order to ensure our strategic plan is fully implemented.

We have identified several risks related to this implementation:

- **Lack of involvement from members**: our members must understand that the Assembly aims to take a major step forward which requires the full involvement of all members alongside the work of the Secretariat. WATRA does not replace the NRAs but should act as a forum for them to build knowledge and solutions together. It therefore relies on the involvement of each member. We must all believe in the benefits that working together within the framework of the Assembly can bring to each and every one of us, and turn the Assembly into a member-led organisation.

- **Limited financial and human resources at the Secretariat**: although this strategic plan limits the scope of work of the Secretariat to that of a co-ordination structure, it also allocates new missions to the Secretariat (e.g. establishing working groups and collecting and publishing benchmarks, among others). WATRA members need to keep their expectations in line with the resources of the Secretariat – and consider increasing these resources once the Assembly has been revitalised – so that those initiatives in the strategic plan that rely on the Secretariat can be fully implemented.

- **Competing priorities among members**: although the set-up of working groups, the training workshops and the benchmarks to be published by the Secretariat should provide every member with a range of new benefits, it is possible that some members will feel their priorities are not being addressed and that they have become disenfranchised within the Assembly. If this situation was to arise, the member(s) concerned should raise it immediately with the other members and the Secretariat, so that remedial actions could be taken.

- **Lack of cooperation with other regional bodies**: it would be detrimental to the efficiency of the Assembly if it did not coordinate its work with the other regional bodies for a synergy of actions. A lack of cooperation would risk an unnecessary duplication of efforts, or even in the worst case, the pursuit of conflicting priorities.

6 Concluding remarks

This strategic plan for WATRA charts a course for the Assembly over the next few years. It is ambitious yet realistic. It acknowledges that the Assembly needs to reform itself, and that our members need to increase their involvement in the work of the Assembly to maximise the benefits that we can collectively generate for all of our members. Once this stronger engagement has been established, the Assembly will be able to engage with other stakeholders in the public and private sectors, which may bring in extra funding and relevant knowledge.

Collaboration among Assembly members and with other external stakeholders will be essential if we are to successfully implement this plan. Collaboration and knowledge sharing, through working groups and workshops, will continue to be co-ordinated by the Secretariat, which can also host a repository of data and benchmarks on the telecommunications markets of our member countries. These joint efforts and knowledge sharing will assist Assembly members in fulfilling their mandate as national regulatory authorities, promoting open, fair and efficient telecommunications/ICT market to the benefit of end users across West Africa.

Monitoring the progress of the initiatives described in this strategic plan will be essential to ensure its effective implementation. Once they are established, many of the initiatives will need to be sustained, throughout the duration of this strategic plan and beyond, to provide continuity with the next strategic plan. The next strategic plan can then aim to expand the scope and extent of action of the Assembly, building on a stronger organisation with effective collaboration in place.

Together, we will shape a great future for the telecoms markets of West Africa.