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ECOWAS Prioritises Affordable Internet Access in West Africa

14 November 2016. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has become the newest member of the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) – an international coalition of organisations working to reduce the cost of an internet connection and enable increased broadband access around the world. In a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the World Wide Web Foundation, which hosts the secretariat of A4AI, ECOWAS has committed to work toward expanding access to fixed-line and mobile internet, and to support a research agenda that will provide robust evidence for developing the policies needed to expand access in West Africa.

A4AI is the world’s broadest technology sector coalition, with more than 80 members from across the private, public and not-for-profit sectors, including Google, the US Agency for International Development, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. Launched in 2013 by the World Wide Web Foundation, A4AI is currently working in six countries – Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Mozambique, Myanmar, and the Dominican Republic – to drive down the cost of broadband internet through locally driven policy and regulatory change.

ECOWAS and its 15 member states – including three of the nations where A4AI is currently working – are committed to promoting economic growth and integration across West Africa, and recognise that expanding access to and use of the internet has the power to underpin this development. Today, nearly 75% of Africa’s population is still unconnected. Affordability remains a significant barrier to increased access across the continent, as broadband prices throughout many of the ECOWAS countries remain prohibitively expensive. Through collaborative work on research, capacity building, and policymaking, ECOWAS and A4AI will work to develop and implement the policy and regulatory frameworks needed to reduce the cost to connect for telecommunications service providers and consumers alike.

Commenting on its new membership in the Alliance, Isaias Barreto da Rosa, ECOWAS’ Commissioner for Telecommunications and IT, said:

“At ECOWAS, we are committed to sustainable economic development in West Africa, as well as to developing a more prosperous Africa. The opportunities for entrepreneurship, learning, and growth afforded through a connection to the internet are limitless, and achieving our vision for a



stronger West Africa will require us putting internet access at the heart of our work. Working with the Alliance for Affordable Internet to develop the smart policies needed to promote competition and growth in the telecommunications sector and enable connection prices to fall is a critical step toward expanding access and allowing our citizens to tap into the vast development potential on the web. We are proud to be the newest member of A4AI, and look forward to working closely with all of the Alliance members to making affordable internet access a reality for all.”

A4AI Executive Director Sonia Jorge added:

“Our new partnership with ECOWAS coincides with an exciting time in A4AI’s history — the Alliance just recently celebrated its third anniversary, and has embarked on a new five-year strategy focused on achieving full digital inclusion across the developing world. Working with ECOWAS will provide a unique opportunity to scale our successes in the sub-region, and work toward further policy change to bring about digital equality across the African continent.”

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Notes to editors:

1. About the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI):

The Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) is the world’s broadest technology sector coalition working to drive down the cost of Internet access in less developed countries. Comprising over 80 member organisations from across the private, public and not-for-profit sectors in both developed and developing nations. The World Wide Web Foundation, founded by Web inventor Sir Tim Berners-Lee, initiated the Alliance in 2013. A4AI global sponsors include Google and USAID. For more, please visit: www.a4ai.org.

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