The Africa Digital Rights Fund Guidelines

Background

The Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) has partnered with Digital Action to support work on tech accountability in Sub-Saharan Africa in the run-up to and during the "Year of Democracy" in 2024. This support will be channeled through the Tech Accountability Fund that will be administered under the auspices of the Africa Digital Rights Fund (ADRF).

Numerous African countries, including the Comoros, Senegal, Mauritania, Rwanda, Mozambique, Ghana, Algeria, Botswana, Chad, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, South Sudan and Tunisia, are headed to the polls during 2024. Electoral processes are essential to building democracy, and given growing threats to information integrity and technology use in elections, it is crucial to conduct platform accountability around electoral processes. The Fund responds to these key concerns in the Year of Democracy and to the scant resources to African civil society entities that are working to counter tech harms.

In 2022, Africa had around 570 million internet users, of which 384 million (67%) were social media users. These users, most of whom are the youth, are increasingly using social media applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok for content creation and entertainment, business, advertising and entrepreneurship, communication and connection, education and learning, civic engagement and activism. As the users increase, reports from social media companies indicate the rise of harmful, illegal or offensive content on the platforms.

In response, social media companies have employed various measures to review, screen, and filter content to ensure it meets their community guidelines or policies and does not adversely affect the user experience on the platforms. The content moderation tools and techniques applied include keyword filtering, machine learning algorithms and human review.

Despite these efforts, the inadequacy of the measures undertaken by social media platforms and social networking sites in moderating illegal, harmful or offensive content has increasingly been questioned. [In Ethiopia](#) for instance, social media companies have been accused of not doing enough to moderate such content, which has gone on to cause real-world harm, such as fuelling killings. Starkly, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are accused of deploying minuscule resources and measures in content moderation in Africa, relative to investments in the United States and Europe.

Key concerns about content moderation in Africa include the limited understanding by platforms of the cultural context in the continent, the lack of cultural sensitivity, labour rights violations, bias and discrimination of algorithms, non-application of local laws, lack of transparency and accountability in content moderation, all of which have an impact on freedom of expression and civic participation.

Funding priorities
Grants will be made to support individuals/groups to undertake:
- **Advocacy:** To engage and interface with key decision-makers and other critical actors to advance recommendations to address platform harms and raise awareness on critical issues.
  - *Examples of this could include projects that: refine and advance particular recommendations to platforms on how to respond to the expected online harms around elections; inform platforms on the offline harms correlated with online harms taking place around elections; bring about a minimum commitment by platforms on how they can augment their response whenever elections are upcoming.*

- **Research**: To strengthen and undertake critical quantitative and qualitative research around the nature of harms and their effects on rights and electoral integrity.
  - *Examples of this could include: Research mapping digital harms that have taken place before, during, or after particular election(s); Research identifying offline harm that is correlated with online harms happening before, during, or after particular election(s); Cross-regional research/learning, e.g. on the trends across regions and strategies for tech accountability.*

- **Storytelling:** To produce (and amplify existing) stories and investigations.
  - *Examples of this could include: A podcast telling stories of online harms happening before, during, or after elections; A series of first-hand written accounts documenting incidents of online harms and their real-world impacts on people.*

- **Travel**: We recognise barriers to participation by the global majority in key global and regional fora on tech accountability. Where travel is directly related to project activities or the wider "Year of Democracy" campaign, there is also an opportunity to explore supporting under-resourced organisations with funds to cover the costs of travel.

The Fund is particularly interested in work related to but not limited to:
- Online gender-based violence, particularly against women politicians and women journalists
- Network disruptions
- Content moderation

- Microtargeting and political advertising
- Hate speech
- Electoral Disinformation
- Electoral specific harms e.g. effects on freedom of expression and citizens' ability to make independent choices and participate in electoral processes.

Eligibility
The funds will be accessible to organisations and coalitions working on tech accountability, aligned to one or more of the funding priorities detailed above.

Grantees will preferably have formal registration but organisations and coalitions without formal registration may be considered subject to demonstrated track records.

The activities to be funded must be focused on Sub-Saharan Africa.

Priority will be given to organisations and coalitions that incorporate marginalised/minority groups.

Ineligible activities include those outside of the funding priorities listed above. The fund will also not support scholarships, costs related to proposal development, equipment or asset acquisitions or reimbursement of costs that have already been incurred.

Grant size and duration
Grant sizes will range from USD 5,000 to USD 20,000 subject to demonstrated need. Cost sharing is strongly encouraged. Funding shall be for periods between six and 12 months.

Governance and decision making on grants
Funds are managed by CIPESA. Funding applications will be reviewed by CIPESA and external experts.

Assessment criteria
- If the proposed intervention fits within the funding priorities
- Relevance to the given context/country
- Track record and experience
- Potential impact of the intervention on platform accountability and the wider "Year of Democracy" campaign.