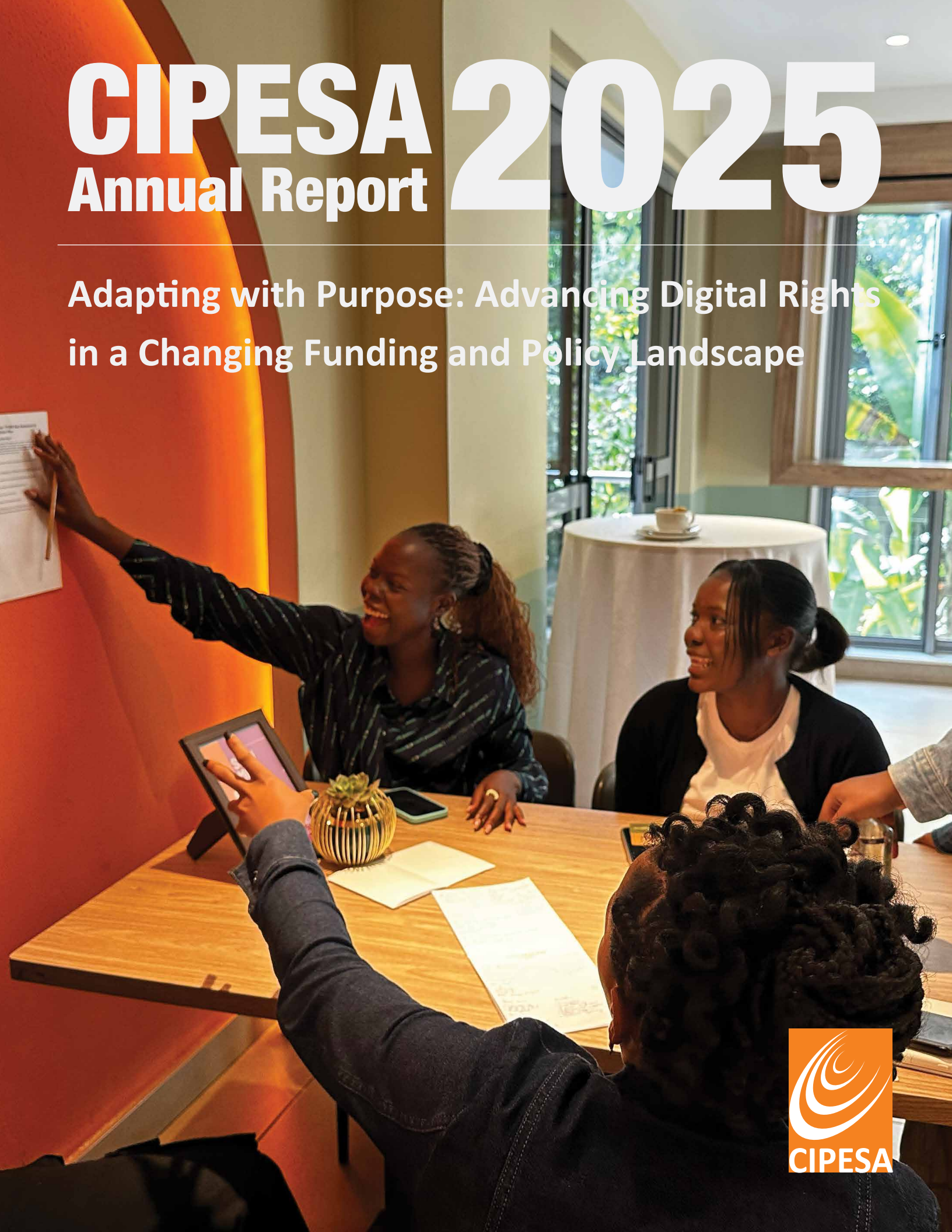


CIPESA 2025

Annual Report

Adapting with Purpose: Advancing Digital Rights
in a Changing Funding and Policy Landscape



Vision: To be Africa's leading ICT policy and governance think tank

Mission: To promote inclusive and effective use of ICT in Africa for improved governance and livelihoods.

Strategic Objectives

1. Promote online participation of civic actors in Africa
2. Promote and advance internet freedom and governance in Africa
3. Promote the effective and efficient use and protection of data by state and non-state actors
4. Enhance the digital resilience and adaptability of Civil Society Organisations in the face of cyber threats
5. Promote equitable access to and use of digital technologies for the most underserved population
6. Promote economic growth through digital technologies



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List of Acronyms

ABHR	African Business and Human Rights Forum
ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
ADRF	Africa Digital Rights Fund
AERC	African Economic Research Consortium
AI	Artificial Intelligence
APC	Association for Progressive Communications
BHR	Business and Human Rights
CDT	Center for Democracy & Technology
CIPE	Center for International Private Enterprise
CIPESA	Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DISARM	Disinformation Analysis and Risk Management framework
DPI	Digital Public Infrastructure
DPG(s)	Digital Public Goods
DRAA	Digital Rights Alliance Africa
EAC	East African Community
EPS	Express Penalty Scheme
EU-D4D	European Union Digital for Development Hub
FIFAfrica	Forum on Internet Freedom in Africa
HRDs	Human Rights Defenders
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IGF	Internet Governance Forum
ICNL	International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
M20	Media 20 Summit
MFA	Media Focus on Africa
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
MRU	Mano River Union
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NDI	National Democratic Institute
ODHR	Observatory of Human Rights
PAI	Partnership on Artificial Intelligence
PALU	Pan African Lawyers Union
PSFU	Private Sector Foundation Uganda
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TFGBV	Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence
TFVAWG	Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women and Girls
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGPs	United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WSIS+20	World Summit on the Information Society +20 Review

Foreword

Foreword: Adapting with Purpose: Shaping a Rights-Respecting Digital Future

2025 was a year defined by both acceleration and constraint. Across Africa, governments rapidly expanded the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), including national digital ID systems, surveillance tools, and e-government platforms, reshaping how power is exercised, services are delivered, and citizens engage with the state. At the same time, digital platforms remained central to political and civic life, amplifying both civic participation and manipulation.

Yet this expansion was not matched by adequate safeguards. Regulatory frameworks lagged behind technological adoption, creating openings for misuse. For instance, in Zambia, newly enacted cyber laws broadened surveillance powers. In Tanzania, the blocking of X (formerly Twitter) during the election period, alongside arrests and deportations of regional activists, showed how digital controls are deployed in politically sensitive moments. In Uganda, arrests linked to online expression underscored the risks faced by journalists and citizens navigating digital spaces.

These developments reflect a wider shift: technology is no longer neutral infrastructure; it is increasingly a site of contestation over rights, power, and accountability. They also reflect a broader democratic regression across the continent, characterised by diminishing civic space, weakening institutional safeguards, and increasing public skepticism towards democratic processes. Digital technologies increasingly contribute to this change, expanding avenues for participation, while also being used to restrict them through internet disruptions, coordinated disinformation, and advanced methods of state surveillance. Digital authoritarianism is deepening, with control exercised not only through blatant censorship, but through the manipulation of information ecosystems and ongoing deficiencies in tech platform accountability. These growing efforts by governments to exert control over data and digital systems are creating new tensions between governance and rights, underscoring the need for more deliberate, rights-oriented approaches to digital transformation.

The benefits of digital advancement also remained deeply uneven. Persistent gaps in connectivity, affordability, and digital literacy continue to exclude large segments of the population, particularly women, youth, persons with disabilities, and rural communities. While platform economies and digital labour markets are growing, many people remain locked into low-value segments or excluded altogether, raising urgent questions about who truly benefits from digital transformation.

At the same time, the global funding landscape has changed significantly. Changes among major donors, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), have introduced new constraints across the civil society ecosystem, affecting the scale, continuity, and flexibility of programming. For organisations working at the intersection of technology and human rights, this moment demanded not just resilience, but deliberate repositioning.

In response, CIPESA undertook a deliberate strategic pivot. We deepened our focus on AI governance, digital public infrastructure, data governance, and business and human rights, while strengthening our role as a producer of research evidence, a convener of dialogue, and a catalyst of policy influence. Institutionally, we strengthened partnerships, expanded our reach, and engaged more actively in policy processes at national, regional, and global levels.

We are deeply grateful to all our funding partners whose support made our 2025 work possible. In a year marked by significant shifts in the global funding landscape, their continued trust and commitment to digital rights in Africa was both enabling and affirming. We remain committed to advancing an open, inclusive, and rights-respecting digital ecosystem in Africa, confident that when evidence, advocacy, and collective action come together, meaningful change is possible.



Section 1:

Alignment of 2025 Results to Strategic Objectives



1,320
Stakeholders
Trained

68%

Participants
reported increased
engagement in
policy and
advocacy

20

CSOs across

18
Countries

From Engagement to Influence: Promoting Online Participation of Civic Actors in Africa

In 2025, our work moved beyond who participates in digital governance across Africa to strengthening the quality and influence of that participation. Through various training engagements and digital security clinics, more than 1,320 stakeholders including civil society organisations, journalists, and policymakers strengthened their skills and confidence to engage meaningfully in governance processes. As a result, 68% of participants reported increased engagement in policy and advocacy, while 20 CSOs and human rights defenders across 18 countries took on more active roles in national and regional digital governance discussions, contributing to more inclusive and representative processes.

This shift was particularly pronounced among journalists, who played a growing role in shaping public understanding of digital governance. We engaged them through training and fellowship programmes, including 20 fellows who produced more than 50 public interest stories amplifying citizen-centred perspectives on digital systems and their governance. 78% of participants reported increased confidence in engaging policymakers and shaping public discourse, reflecting a shift toward more informed and evidence-based reporting. These gains were reinforced through sustained convenings that created ongoing platforms for meaningful engagement between civic actors and decision-makers, helping to move beyond one-off interactions to continuous dialogue and influence.



36

Research Outputs
reports, policy
briefs, and
commentaries

200

Media Mentions
and Citations

Documenting Restrictions, Driving Change: Advancing Internet Freedom Across Africa

Our research and advocacy played a critical role in advancing internet freedom across Africa by documenting restrictions on digital expression, analysing emerging threats such as AI-driven disinformation, and building the evidence base for advocacy against restrictive laws. In 2025, we produced 36 research outputs including reports, policy briefs, and commentaries on internet freedom, digital civic space, and platform accountability, which generated more than 200 media mentions and citations, reflecting both the reach and relevance of our work.

In doing so, our work consistently brought accountability concerns into policy and public debates, while equipping civil society, journalists, and policymakers with the knowledge and evidence to inform advocacy and decision-making.



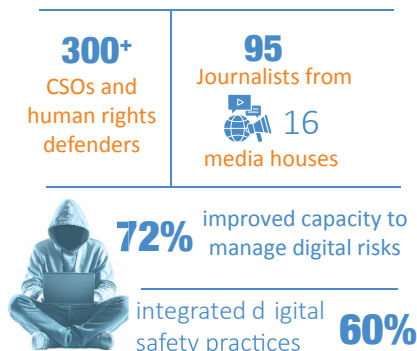
Strengthening Data Governance Across Africa Through the Effective Use and Protection of Data

In 2025, we championed the responsible use and protection of data by supporting the development of national data governance frameworks. In Lesotho and Liberia, we directly supported the development of two national data governance policies through inclusive consultations that engaged more than 250 stakeholders. Targeted capacity-building reached 191 policymakers, regulators, and private sector actors across three countries (Uganda, Liberia, and Lesotho), and 120 regional stakeholders drawn from all member states of the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). These efforts contributed to the alignment of national policies with the African Union Data Policy Framework (AUDPF) and to growing knowledge about its practical implementation at national levels as well as within regional economic blocs. This is an important step toward interoperable, rights-respecting data ecosystems that support cross-border trade and service delivery across the continent. 68% of the stakeholders we engaged reported applying data protection principles in their work, reflecting not just knowledge transfer but a tangible shift in how data governance is understood and implemented by key actors.

Enhancing the Digital Resilience and Adaptability of Civil Society Actors

Digital threats affect different actors in different ways, with CSOs and human rights defenders that operate in constrained and surveilled environments facing some of the most acute risks yet they have the least support to manage them. In response, we provided training, practical toolkits, digital security clinics, and advocacy support, reaching more than 300 CSOs and human rights defenders, as well as 95 journalists from 16 media houses. These engagements strengthened participants' ability to adopt safer digital practices and improve their operational resilience.

As a result, 72% reported improved capacity to manage digital risks, while 60% integrated digital safety practices into their ongoing operations, reflecting sustained behavioural change beyond one-off awareness. We also developed and disseminated five practical toolkits and guides to support continued use beyond our direct engagements. These interventions contributed to increased documentation of digital threats and strengthened the ability of civil society actors to operate safely and effectively in increasingly hostile environments.

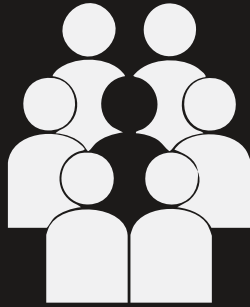


Promoting Economic Growth Through Digital Technologies

Responsible data use and digital safety are not constraints on economic growth; they are enabling conditions for it. In 2025, our Business and Human Rights (BHR) work made this case directly to Uganda's business sector, engaging more than 100 SMEs and business actors across the Busoga, Central, and Albertine regions. We developed and disseminated a practical digital rights toolkit tailored to private sector needs, and supported businesses to understand and implement their responsibilities around data protection, cybersecurity, and labour rights in digital workplaces. Through engagement with private sector actors, civil society, and government institutions, our work strengthened collaboration across sectors and contributed to a more accountable and resilient digital economy, where digital rights are increasingly recognised not as a compliance burden, but as a foundation for trust, competitiveness, and sustainable growth.



2025 at a Glance



21,800,000 +

Total
individuals
reached



4,800

Direct beneficiaries
engaged



18 Countries
reached



182,687

Social Media reach
(X, Facebook, LinkedIn,
Youtube, Instagram)



28

Events convened
/participated in



4,800

Total event participants
(trainings, dialogues
& forums)

36 

Publications
(research reports,
policy briefs, blogs)
produced



22

**Policy
engagements
conducted**



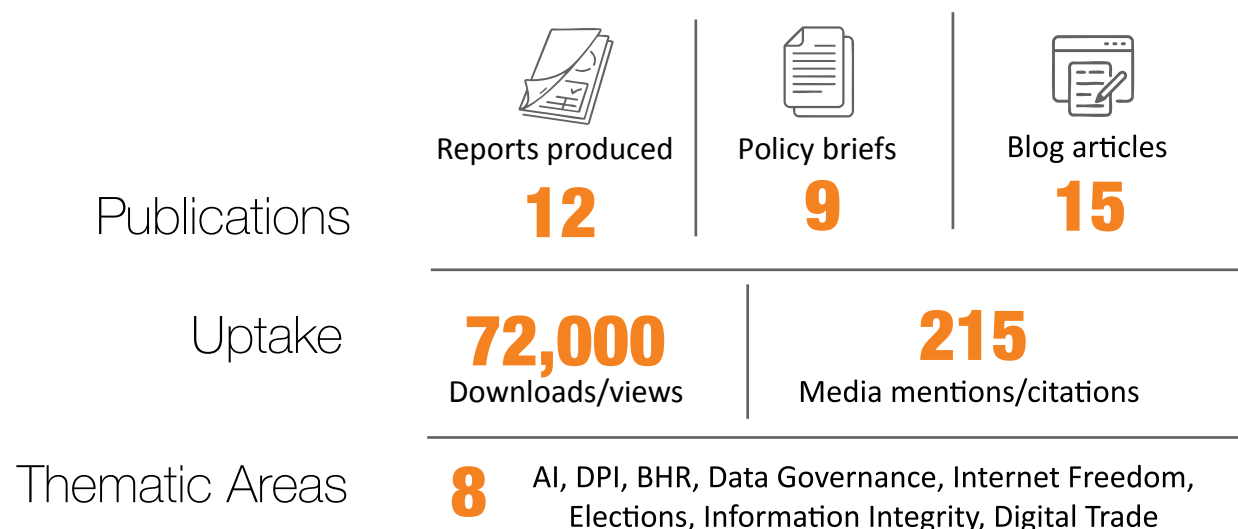
19

**Strategic
partnerships**

Section 2:

Key Achievements and Activities in 2025

Research & Knowledge Production



2.1. Advancing ICT Policy Through Evidence-Based Research

In 2025, we intensified our research focus in response to the growing consolidation of digital authoritarian practices across Africa and advances in technology. By increasing our research output by 30% compared to 2024, and achieving a 30% rise in evidence uptake, we moved beyond documenting digital rights violations to more actively shaping regulatory debates and policy responses. More than 70% of engaged stakeholders reported referencing our research outputs in their advocacy, policy processes, or institutional work, reflecting not just its reach but also its practical relevance. In addition, a 20% increase in policy engagements allowed us to elevate African perspectives into global human rights processes. Our legal and policy analysis exposed regulatory and accountability gaps, increasing scrutiny of digital laws and systems. In the following sections, we highlight some of our research and the areas it addressed.

Digital Rights and the Changing Civic Space

As the digital civic space continued to shrink across Africa, our research provided a critical evidence base to track emerging threats and inform responses to restrictive laws, censorship, and surveillance practices. We focused on documenting patterns of internet disruptions, legislative overreach, and the growing use of digital tools to constrain civic participation, and equipping stakeholders with evidence-based analysis to challenge these trends.

The State of Internet Freedom in Africa 2025: Our flagship, the 12th edition of the [State of Internet Freedom in Africa Report](#), served as our analytical anchor for the year. By mapping how AI is deployed across governance and civic space, the report identified a dual reality: while AI offers transformative potential for public service delivery and democracy, its uncritical adoption threatens digital rights and exacerbates existing gaps in civic space.

Navigating the Implications of AI on Digital Democracy in Africa

September, 2025



Image: Cover Page of the State of Internet Freedom in Africa 2025

The study concludes that while AI presents transformative opportunities for strengthening digital democracy, expanding civic space, and protecting digital rights in Africa, its current trajectory is marked by an imbalance. Without a deliberate, proactive, and rights-based approach to AI governance in Africa that is inclusive, transparent, and contextually relevant, AI risks becoming a powerful tool that deepens existing inequalities, facilitates authoritarian control, and fundamentally undermines democratic values and human rights across the continent.

It calls for the enactment of comprehensive AI legislation, requiring mandatory Human Rights Impact Assessments, establishing empowered AI governance institutions for an accountable sector, proactive advocacy of rights-based AI governance, building technical capacities of stakeholders and undertaking efforts to develop AI-centred policies.

Surveillance and Harassment of Digital Activists: Our policy brief, [Surveillance, Activism, and the Urgent Fight for Digital Rights](#) in 2025, highlighted a deteriorating environment characterised by increased censorship of online expression, rising disinformation, data breaches and cyber threats especially against journalists and activists. Drawing on developments in Kenya and across the region, the analysis underscored how economic pressures and political tensions are intersecting with digital repression, reinforcing the need for sustained and coordinated defence of digital rights by state and non-state actors.

In the lead up to the 2026 general elections, we highlighted [Uganda's Increasing Pressure on Social Media Critics](#), documenting a wave of arrests, warnings, and regulatory threats targeting online critics, particularly users of TikTok, X, and YouTube. The analysis provided timely evidence of the shrinking digital civic space and the implications for freedom of expression and democratic participation.

Legislative and Regulatory Trends: We analysed [Zambia's Cyber Security Act, 2025](#) and Cyber Crimes Act, 2025, highlighting risks posed by broad surveillance powers and weak oversight safeguards, supporting civil society engagement with legislative processes and contributing to scrutiny of the laws' human rights implications. The latest analysis followed one that CIPESA and Bloggers of Zambia conducted in 2024, in which we implored the government not to pass the two laws before addressing their human rights deficiencies. Enactment of these laws reflects a broader trend across Africa, where cyber legislation is increasingly used to restrict democratic participation rather than safeguard citizens from cyber threats, echoing patterns in which digital regulation is repurposed as a tool for political control.

Our investigation into Uganda's Express Penalty Scheme (EPS) exposed the systemic failure of opaque digital systems, sparking a review of citizen redress mechanisms.

In Uganda, we worked with Pollicy to make [recommendations](#) to the parliament to address gaps in the Sexual Offences Bill, calling for stronger recognition of technology-facilitated harms and alignment between digital and physical protections.

We also [analysed](#) a landmark ruling by the Ugandan Personal Data Protection Office requiring Google LLC to register locally, reinforcing the principle that global technology companies are subject to domestic data protection laws. While the decision marked progress in asserting digital sovereignty, our analysis highlighted persistent enforcement limitations, particularly around regulatory capacity and sanctions, pointing to the need for stronger accountability frameworks.

Governance of Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technology

In 2025, we advanced analysis and advocacy on the governance of emerging technologies, focusing on the intersection of artificial intelligence, platform power, and democratic integrity. Our work emphasised the increasing disparity between swift technological advancement and the regulatory frameworks required to protect human rights, accountability, and inclusion across African digital ecosystems.

AI Development and Governance: We examined the gap between technological hype and regulatory reality, ensuring that AI development is grounded in African realities. Our research, including [Why It's Not Yet Uhuru for Artificial Intelligence in Africa and What To Do About It](#), challenged the prevailing narrative of AI as a universal panacea by identifying structural adoption gaps. It reflected on key outcomes from the inaugural Global Summit on Artificial Intelligence in Kigali, Rwanda, highlighting both the significant gap in AI development and adoption between African countries and the rest of the world, and the continent's potential to benefit from strategic investments. This evidence informed our joint statement, [Making AI More Participatory and Inclusive for the Benefit of All Africans](#), issued on August 6, 2025 highlighting CIPESA's contribution to a more inclusive and rights-based artificial intelligence governance in Africa. It stressed that although AI presents significant opportunities for development, its governance must meaningfully include civil society, marginalised communities, and local actors. It called for sustained multi-stakeholder engagement beyond high-level convenings, to ensure that AI systems developed in Africa are both contextually relevant and grounded in human rights principles.

Our investigation into Uganda's Express Penalty Scheme (EPS) exposed the systemic failure of opaque digital systems, sparking a review of citizen redress mechanisms.

Additionally, our analysis of the suspension of [Uganda's Express Penalty Scheme \(EPS\)](#) exposed systemic failures in data collection and citizen redress mechanisms. The analysis pointed to critical gaps in accountability, transparency, and citizen engagement, including opaque data collection practices, limited oversight, and inadequate mechanisms for redress.

By linking this local system failure to the broader regional findings of our media monitoring study, we have transformed a technical infrastructure critique into a clear policy case for “rights-based design” and inclusive implementation. Our research in this area continues to serve as the primary evidence base for our advocacy on national and regional data governance, ensuring that as countries align their policies with the African Union Data Policy Framework (AUDPF), they are doing so with a firm commitment to transparency, accountability, and the protection of fundamental digital rights.

Platform Accountability and Information Integrity: We mapped the ways in which digital platforms shape the information ecosystem, exposing the risks to democratic processes. Drawing on evidence from the Democratising Big Tech project supported by the African Digital Rights Fund (ADRF), and lessons from South Africa's 2024 elections, we analysed the [growing influence of algorithms](#) and private technology companies on political communication and information ecosystems. The findings highlighted how misinformation, harmful content, and weak content moderation disproportionately affected marginalised groups, exposing gaps in platform accountability and regulatory oversight. These findings reinforced the need for stronger regulatory frameworks, greater transparency from technology companies, increased public awareness, and enhanced regional collaboration to safeguard information integrity and democratic participation in Africa.

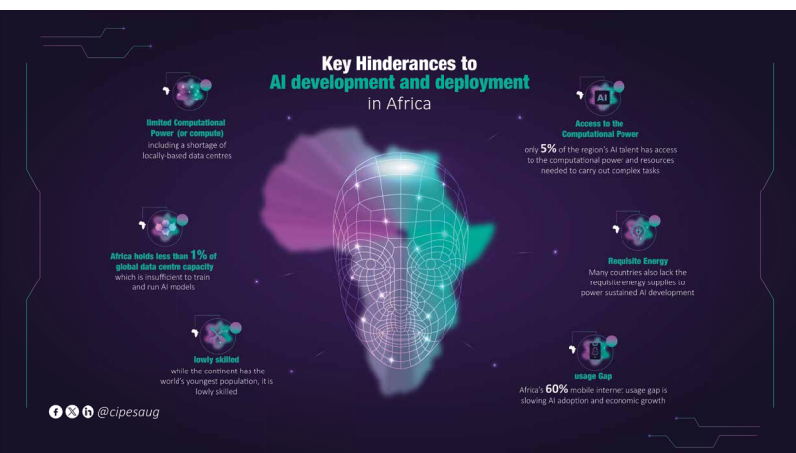


Image: Infograph Key Hinderances to AI Development and Deployment in Africa

Digital Public Infrastructure and Data Governance: As governments rapidly deploy national digital systems, our research has been critical in identifying the “transparency gap” in government-run infrastructure. A central component of this work in 2025 was our baseline study on [Media Coverage of Digital Public Infrastructure and Digital Public Goods in Eastern Africa](#), which analysed more than 680 stories across seven countries. The study revealed a concerning trend: media coverage remains largely uncritical, focusing on administrative efficiency while failing to interrogate the risks to privacy, data sovereignty, and inclusive access. This research has allowed us to move beyond mere critique; it provides the empirical basis for our ongoing DPI Journalism Fellowship, which trains regional journalists to move past “hype-driven” reporting toward investigative, rights-based coverage.

2.2 . Knowledge and Skills Development

Capacity Building at a Glance



Trainings

Number of trainings conducted

16

Number of participants trained

498



Fellowships

Number of fellows supported

20

Countries represented in fellowships

9



Outcomes

% participants reporting improved knowledge

87%



Tools

Toolkits/ guides developed

5

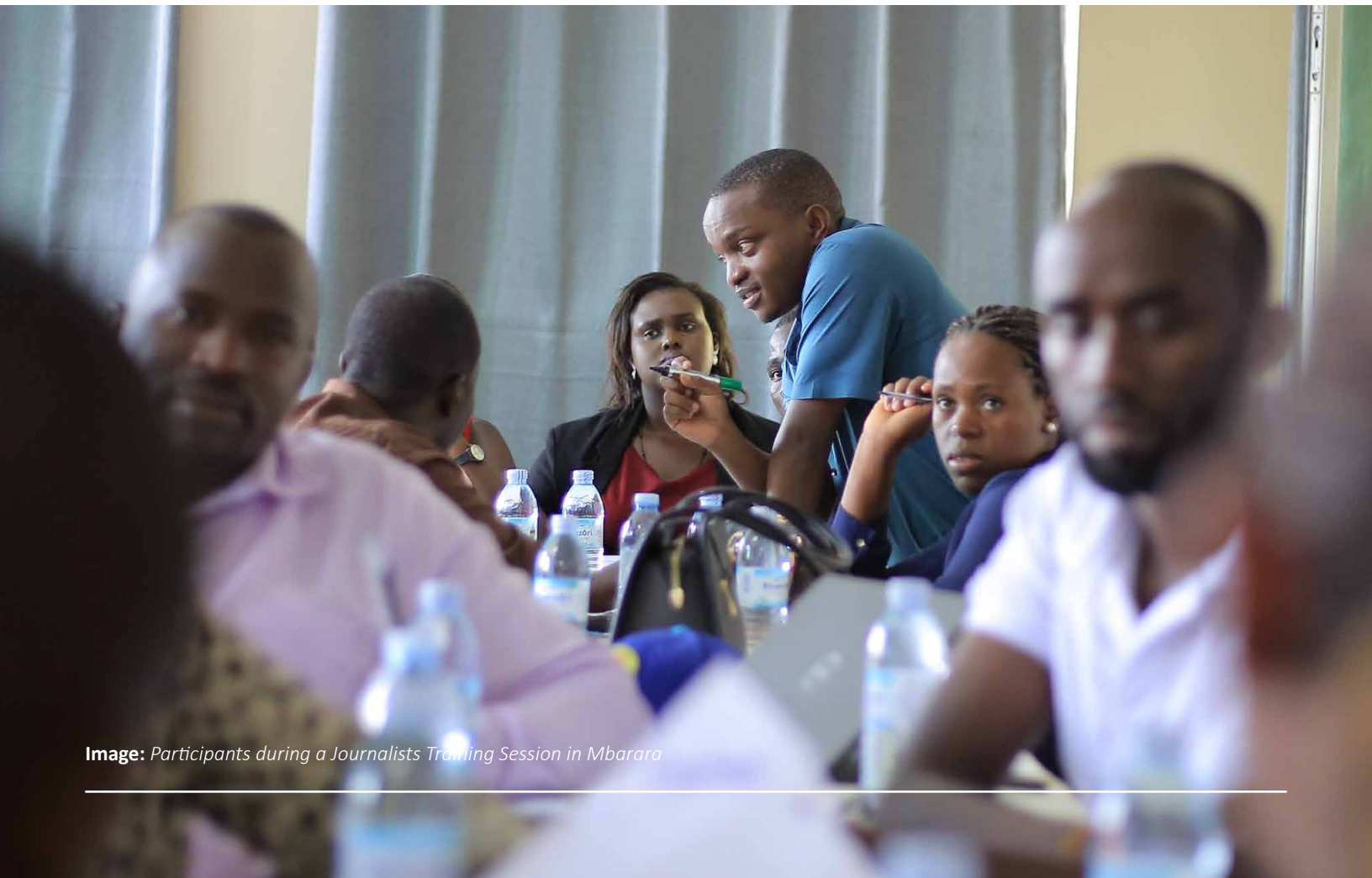


Image: Participants during a Journalists Training Session in Mbarara

In 2025, CIPESA's capacity-building efforts focused on translating knowledge into practical influence, equipping policymakers, journalists, civil society, and grassroots actors not only to understand digital rights and digital governance challenges, but to act on them. Through 16 targeted trainings that reached more than 498 participants, 87% of stakeholders demonstrated improved knowledge, increased confidence, and greater participation in digital governance processes. These engagements contributed to a growing network of applying digital rights principles in policy, advocacy, and practice, which is essential in strengthening the ecosystem needed to sustain open and accountable digital governance across Africa. Below are highlights of our capacity development work:

a) Strengthening Data Governance Capacity Across Africa

Our work in data governance was designed to bridge the gap between policy commitments and national implementation. As part of efforts to strengthen the national capacity to advance countries' digital transformation agenda, we conducted training workshops in [Liberia](#), [Lesotho](#), [Uganda](#), [Rwanda](#), and [Madagascar](#) in partnership with the African Union Commission and GIZ. We trained 367 regulators, policy makers, civil society representatives, and the private sector actors in these countries on harmonising data protection frameworks to support cross-border data flows and regional trade.

At the regional level, our work extended to actors within the East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC), reinforcing efforts towards interoperable and rights-based data systems. Notably, these engagements directly contributed to policy processes, including CIPESA supporting the governments of [Liberia](#) and [Lesotho](#) to develop national data governance policies aligned with the African Union Data Policy Framework. See more here: [Lesotho Charts a Progressive Path for Data Governance](#).

We complemented these efforts through knowledge exchange engagements, including a learning session on regulating the migration of health data in Sub-Saharan Africa, held in partnership with the University of Warwick. The session brought together key stakeholders to examine the risks and opportunities of cross-border health data flows, highlighting critical issues around privacy, security, and regulatory gaps, and emphasising the need for harmonised, rights-based data governance frameworks in the region.

b) Advancing Business and Human Rights in the Digital Economy

Through a targeted Business and Human rights (BHR) [bootcamp](#), we strengthened the capacities of civil society organisations, business associations, and innovation hubs to engage with digital rights issues within Uganda's business sector. The training supported 35 participants from partner organisations to develop actionable awareness and advocacy plans aligned with the Uganda National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights.

At the regional level, we explored the progress made by the East Africa Community in advancing digital trade while outlining barriers affecting its deployment and how policymakers, civil society, and other actors can promote a human rights-based digital economy in the region.

Drawing on insights from the ongoing BHR engagements in Uganda, [CIPESA participated](#) in the [fourth edition](#) of the African Business and Human Rights (ABHR) Forum held in Lusaka, Zambia. Similarly, at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights held in Geneva in November 2025, CIPESA participated in a session on "How the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and Objective 3 of the Global Digital Compact can shape rights-respecting AI ecosystems." Finally, at the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) Summit in Nairobi, Kenya, CIPESA made the case for [why data and AI governance are central to Africa's digital trade ambition](#).



Image: Training Session during the Business and Human Rights Learning Bootcamp

c) Shaping Public Understanding of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)

Our DPI Journalism Fellowship served as a cornerstone of our efforts to shift public discourse. We strengthened media capacity to critically engage with DPI through a fellowship programme bringing together 20 journalists from 9 countries. Through in-person and virtual engagements, fellows developed skills in policy analysis, investigative reporting, cross-border collaboration, and data storytelling, with a focus on humanising complex technology issues. This work contributed to improved public discourse on DPI, supported by a regional convening in Nairobi that brought together journalists, policymakers, and civil society actors from across Eastern Africa to reflect on media coverage of digital systems and their societal impact. The event highlighted the Fellowship's emerging role as a catalyst for informed debate on the intersection between media, governance, and digital transformation.

Meanwhile, CIPESA participated in the Global DPI Summit in South Africa, contributing African perspectives on the governance, inclusivity, and accountability of digital public systems. We emphasised the need for rights-based approaches to DPI implementation, to ensure that digital systems are transparent, inclusive, and responsive to citizens' needs.

d) Building Regional Capacity on AI Governance

As AI increasingly shapes governance and civic space, we built capacity among key stakeholders to engage with its implications. A regional training in Namibia that brought together human rights defenders, journalists, and policymakers from 15 African countries, strengthened participants' understanding of AI and its implications, while exploring their role in harnessing AI's opportunities and advancing rights-respecting regulatory approaches across the continent.

We joined Partnership on AI (PAI) stakeholders, including Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT) and Digital Action, to discuss [AI's use in election information and AI regulations](#). We highlighted how the rapid rise of generative AI was shaping the global electoral landscape, emphasising the growing risks of synthetic media, misinformation, and weak platform accountability, particularly in African contexts where regulatory and institutional safeguards remain limited. We called for strong context-specific regulation, improved platform accountability, and coordinated global and regional efforts to ensure that the use of AI in elections protects democratic integrity and upholds fundamental rights. The training emphasised the need for newsroom AI policies, strengthened fact-checking, and human oversight to ensure that AI enhances rather than undermines credible and independent journalism.

CIPESA co-hosted the East African AI Forum and Advocates Training in partnership with Paradigm Initiative, TrustLaw, and Africa Law Practice, bringing together regional stakeholders to strengthen advocacy on AI governance. Separately, alongside the Uganda Editors Guild and WAN-IFRA, we [trained](#) Ugandan editors on ethical use of AI in newsrooms; and we participated in Thomson Reuters Foundation/ TrustLaw's Beyond Disruption: Building Resilient Media and Civic Rights in an AI World workshop on the impact of AI on media and civic space.

e) Digital Resilience & Safety of Social Justice Actors

In the lead-up to Uganda's 2026 election, CIPESA trained 95 journalists from online, broadcast and print media, based in Western, Eastern and Central regions, equipping them with skills on election reporting, legal compliance, countering disinformation, and digital safety. These interventions strengthened the ability of media actors to operate securely in high-risk environments, while maintaining credible and independent reporting.

Complementing these efforts, CIPESA delivered hands-on digital security clinics and help desks, including engagements during Uganda Media Week, where several journalists and HRDs received one-on-one technical support such as device vulnerability assessments, malware removal, account security strengthening, and encrypted data management. This practical support contributed to a critical shift from individualised to institutionalised safety practices, with participants developing structured risk protocols and incident response plans.

At the regional level, CIPESA expanded its resilience work through a three-day digital resilience skills-sharing [workshop](#) in Nairobi, training 25 women human rights defenders from across Africa on addressing online violence, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence, disinformation, and coordinated harassment. Additionally, through platforms such as the Digital Rights and Inclusion Forum (DRIF25), CIPESA operated digital resilience walk-in clinics, further extending support to civil society actors across the continent.

f) Engagement with Parliamentarians and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)

Building on efforts in 2023, we strengthened governance and accountability frameworks in 2025 through targeted engagement with parliamentarians and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), positioning these actors as key drivers of rights-based digital governance. At FIFAfrica25, we facilitated structured dialogues that brought together legislators, regulators, and oversight bodies to examine issues including surveillance, internet shutdowns, platform accountability, and data governance, complemented by capacity-building and peer-learning exchanges. These efforts enhanced the ability of policymakers and NHRIs to interrogate digital laws, strengthen oversight of state and private sector practices, and integrate human rights principles into technology governance, contributing to more informed legislative processes and improved protection of civic space in an increasingly digital environment.

2.3. Policy Engagements and Convenings

In 2025, we enhanced our policy engagement to shift from participation to proactively shaping the agenda. We achieved significant impact via convenings, focused advocacy, and strategic contributions to shape digital governance processes at national, regional, and global levels. Through 29 engagements with governments and regulators, along with 11 formal submissions, we ensured that digital rights considerations were incorporated into emerging policy and regulatory frameworks.

Policy Influence & Advocacy

Policy Engagement



11

Policy submissions made



14

Policy dialogues convened



Government/regulator engagements

Global/Regional Engagement



18

Forums participated in (WSIS, M20, FIFAfrica, etc.)

Influence



7

Instances of policy uptake/influence

a) Convening and Shaping Africa's Digital Rights Agenda: FIFAfrica

Effective digital governance in Africa requires more than just national-level actions; it relies on inclusive, multistakeholder processes that unite various actors to define priorities, negotiate intricate trade-offs, and influence policy and practice broadly. As digital technologies increasingly transcend national borders, the need for continental platforms that prioritise African perspectives and realities has grown crucial. In this context, CIPESA continues to invest in convenings that translate empirical evidence into policy, amplify under-represented voices, and facilitate coordinated approaches to digital governance across the continent.

The Forum on Internet Freedom in Africa (FIFAfrica) remains CIPESA's leading platform for promoting Africa's digital rights agenda, serving as the continent's primary mechanism for bringing together policymakers, regulators, and civil society to exchange ideas, but to shape policy priorities and foster collective action. In 2025, we utilised this platform to shift our convening role from a space for dialogue into a strategic tool for normative agenda-setting. By linking our empirical evidence to actionable policy, resulting in the adoption of the [African Declaration on Digital Freedom and Democracy](#), we reinforced the Forum's position as the definitive platform for codifying rights-respecting digital governance across the continent.

The 12th edition of FIFAfrica brought together 450 stakeholders from across Africa and beyond, including policymakers, regulators, civil society, journalists, and the private sector to engage on pressing issues including AI governance, information integrity, digital public infrastructure, and platform accountability. This reinforces its position as the continent's leading platform for dialogue on internet freedom and digital governance.

Sessions highlighted the growing impact of AI and disinformation on democratic processes, the need for inclusive and rights-based digital policies, and the importance of bridging the gap between policy commitments and implementation. The convening also featured exhibitions, storytelling spaces, and digital security initiatives, designed to connect policy discussions with lived experiences and strengthen community engagement. See details [here](#).

The Forum continues to strengthen collaboration among a diverse network of actors working on digital rights in Africa, fostering partnerships and reinforcing collective advocacy efforts. It also creates space for cross-sector dialogue, enabling shared strategies to address evolving digital challenges.



Image: Motorbike ridden by Andrew Gole on the third edition of Digital Security on Wheels

Biking for Digital Security: From Kampala to Windhoek

In September 2025, CIPESA supported digital security expert and biker Andrew Gole on his third and most ambitious [Digital Security on Wheels](#) expedition - a solo motorbike journey of 13,000 kilometres from Kampala, Uganda through Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Botswana, culminating in Windhoek, Namibia ahead of FIFAfrica25. The campaign directly engaged underserved communities, journalists, and activists through practical, on-the-ground sessions on digital security, privacy, and safe online practices, extending support beyond traditional urban and institutional spaces.

By combining mobility with peer-led learning, the initiative broadened access to digital safety knowledge, particularly among grassroots actors who are often excluded from formal capacity building programmes. Its culmination at FIFAfrica through a dedicated Digital Security Hub further amplified reach and support. Overall, the initiative contributed to strengthening community-level digital resilience, increasing awareness of online risks, and fostering a more inclusive, continent-wide movement for secure and rights-respecting digital participation.

b) Shaping Global and Regional Policy, Accountability and Regulatory Frameworks

To ensure that digital rights are protected beyond national borders, we strengthened Africa's role in regional and global digital governance processes by utilising accountability mechanisms to hold both states and technology companies to account. Through integrating our research and advocacy into African Union (AU) and United Nations (UN) processes, we contributed evidence that influenced the development of normative frameworks and practices regarding information integrity, platform governance, and digital rights, successfully bringing African viewpoints into international policy debates.

Promoting Rights-Based Governance at the AU: We contributed to the development of the technology accountability framework for the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). In particular, we were [involved](#) in regional consultations to develop the African guidelines for monitoring technology companies' roles in ensuring information integrity on their platforms. Additionally, we analysed and [welcomed](#) the ACHPR Resolution on Developing Guidelines to Assist States Monitor Technology Companies in Respect of Their Duty to Maintain Information Integrity Through Independent Fact-Checking, which responds to growing concerns about the role of technology companies in undermining information integrity across Africa.

Leveraging the Universal Periodic Review (UPR): In collaboration with the West Africa ICT Action Network (WAICTANET), Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU), Small Media, University of Birmingham, and Article 19 we submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council reports that shone light on digital rights records of [Liberia](#), Malawi, and [Rwanda](#). [A separate submission on Rwanda](#) with the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) highlighted ongoing digital exclusion, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and weak data protection safeguards. At the 51st session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Pre-sessions held in Geneva on November 2025, we made a presentation as part of a panel composed of representatives from the Observatory of Human Rights (ODHR) and Article 19. The presentation was conducted in advance of the Rwanda's fourth UPR review scheduled for January 2026 and aimed to influence the formulation of advanced questions and recommendations, and strengthen diplomatic awareness of emerging digital rights concerns. These engagements contributed to strengthening international scrutiny of digital governance practices across the region by UN Member States.

Setting Global Standards for Media and Information Integrity: We co-drafted and [endorsed](#) the Johannesburg Declaration adopted at the M20 Summit, which responds to the growing global crisis in information integrity and shrinking civic space. The Declaration underscores the importance of timely, reliable information and independent journalism as a public good essential to peace, access to information, and democratic societies, while calling on governments, media, and the public to strengthen protections for press freedom and foster a human rights-based media ecosystem.

Similarly, through our expert engagement at the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Article19 and the Government of Canada panels on Information Integrity in West Africa and the Sahel, CIPESA shared comparative insights from East and Southern Africa on access to information, regulatory practice, and implementation gaps.

White Paper on Digital Tax reduction: We submitted a [White Paper on ICT tax reduction](#) to the Uganda government, highlighting how current tax policies on digital devices, connectivity, and services are undermining the growth of the country's digital economy. The paper argues that high and complex taxes on smartphones, internet access, and infrastructure are limiting access, stifling innovation, and widening the digital divide. The recommendations called for reforms to promote affordability, expand access, and support inclusive digital growth.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV): We advanced efforts to strengthen legal protections against technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) by engaging directly in national and regional policy processes. In Uganda, we submitted joint recommendations to Parliamentary Committees on Legal Affairs and Gender, calling for the Sexual Offenses Bill to address gaps between physical and digital forms of violence.

Regionally, we utilised ACHPR Resolution 522 to raise awareness of TFGBV and promote rights-based responses, including through expert dialogues around International Women's Day. At the global level, CIPESA contributed technical expertise to a UN Women and APC expert group developing a regional handbook on legal and policy frameworks to combat technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, helping to strengthen coherence between national, regional, and international approaches.

Advancing Respect for Human Rights by Businesses: CIPESA convened the inaugural National Business and Digital Rights Policy Dialogue in Uganda, bringing together 55 stakeholders from government, the private sector, and civil society. The dialogue highlighted key challenges, including data privacy violations, weak regulatory enforcement, digital exclusion, gender disparities, and limited awareness among businesses. It emphasised the need for stronger corporate accountability, policy coherence, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and increased investment in digital access and literacy, to ensure Uganda's digital economy protects fundamental rights. See details here: [Claiming Digital Rights in Uganda's Business Sector](#). This work, alongside our engagements with the Federation of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, provided a roadmap for embedding data privacy and digital ethics into Uganda's MSME growth strategy.

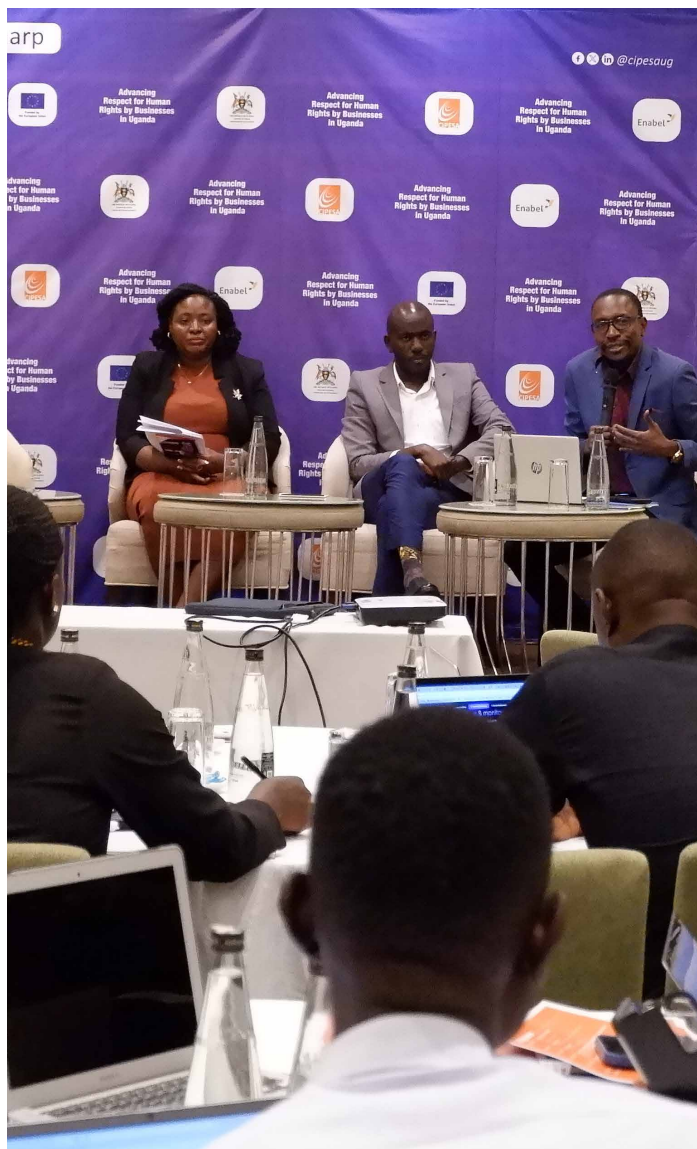


Image: Panel Discussion during the #BeeraSharp National Business and Digital Rights Policy Dialogue

b) Shaping Regional and Global Internet Governance

CIPESA participated in the [Internet Governance Forum \(IGF\)](#), the Africa IGF, and country-level processes including the Uganda and Kenya IGFs, contributing to policy dialogues on repressive cyber laws, data governance, and inclusive digital participation while amplifying civil society perspectives through collaborative platforms. At the Africa IGF in Dar es Salaam in May 2025, CIPESA played a strategic agenda-setting role, including co-hosting a WSIS+20 pre-event to help align African stakeholder positions and engaging in discussions on information integrity and digital democracy. Discussions at the dialogue highlighted growing threats to information integrity, the importance of press freedom, and the need for stronger collaboration between media and civil society to counter disinformation. Key recommendations included strengthening national coordination, developing regional positions, enhancing knowledge sharing, and leveraging platforms such as the Africa Internet Governance Forum to enable a more coordinated and influential African voice in global digital governance. [See details here.](#)

Regionally, CIPESA remained embedded within the East Africa IGF through multi-stakeholder networks that informed both continental and global processes. At the national level, particularly in Uganda and Kenya, CIPESA engaged through partnerships, technical contributions, and stakeholder dialogues. Overall, these engagements strengthened the articulation of African civil society priorities, enhanced regional policy coherence, and reinforced CIPESA's role as a bridge between national realities and global internet governance processes. [See details here.](#)

We also engaged in the Mano River Union (MRU) IGF, contributing to regional discussions on internet governance, digital rights, and policy harmonisation across West Africa. The Forum provided a platform to strengthen regional cooperation and advance inclusive, rights-based digital governance frameworks. At the KTA Annual Symposium, CIPESA contributed to discussions on technology, policy, and innovation in Africa. The engagement provided a platform to share insights on digital governance, data protection, and the broader socio-economic implications of emerging technologies.

Elsewhere, CIPESA engaged in the Internet Accountability Forum to advance discussions on platform governance and corporate responsibility in the digital space. The engagement focused on strengthening accountability mechanisms for technology companies, particularly in addressing harmful content, protecting user rights, and ensuring transparency in platform operations.

Other engagements include:

At the 2025 DataFest, CIPESA contributed to conversations on data governance, innovation, and the role of data in shaping digital economies. We featured at the launch of the 'Made in Africa AI for Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL)' Landscape Study by the MERL Tech Initiative. At the session, [CIPESA provided reflections](#) on the role of AI in development across several humanitarian sectors in Africa. At another session, we, alongside the Datashphere Initiative, hosted a session on [how civil society can actively shape and improve AI governance through regulatory sandboxes](#).

CIPESA participated in the Copenhagen Information Integrity Conference that brought together global stakeholders to explore solutions to disinformation and strengthen democratic resilience.

We also engaged at the Africa Bitcoin Conference, which convened stakeholders to explore the role of digital currencies in promoting economic freedom and financial inclusion.

We participated in the 2025 Global Digital Health Forum, contributing to discussions on the governance of digital health systems and cross-border health data. The engagement highlighted the importance of data privacy, security, and ethical considerations in the deployment of digital health technologies.



Image: Panel Discussion during Data Fest 2025

2.4. Movement Building and Strategic Alliances

Collaboration and strategic alliances are at the heart of CIPESA's approach to advancing digital rights in Africa. In 2025, we strengthened partnerships across civil society, technical communities, academia, and regional networks to pool expertise, expand collective action, and amplify influence on digital governance. These alliances continued to serve as critical platforms for responding to emerging threats and advancing coordinated advocacy across national, regional, and global levels.

In a year of significant funding shifts and shrinking civic space, we acted as a regional stabiliser, ensuring that frontline partners had the resources and solidarity networks needed to maintain their operations and amplify their advocacy.

Below are highlights from the year:

a) The Africa Digital Rights Fund (ADRF):

In response to the changing funding landscape, most notably the shuttering of U.S. foreign funding, the Africa Digital Rights Fund (ADRF) awarded USD 140,000 to 11 non-profit organisations as bridging funds. The awards were aimed at bridging the gap in operations and programming faced by CIPESA's past and present partners and subgrantees. The selection of beneficiaries was guided by a survey on the impact of funding termination by the US government. The funds brought to USD one million the total awarded by CIPESA under the ADRF initiative since its launch in April 2019. The ADRF-supported initiatives in 2025 demonstrated the continued value of flexible, locally driven support.

CIPESA Announces Largest ADRF Grants

ADRF Round 10 **320,000** US Dollars **18** Initiatives

430 Applications **18** Winners **14** Countries

[f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [@cipesaug](#)

Image: Infograph announcing ADRF Grants 2025

Grantee Spotlight: ADRF [Grantee Thraets implemented](#) a multi-pronged strategy to create sustainable solutions for safeguarding democracy against AI-driven misinformation. The initiative was built around three core pillars: public awareness, civic-tech innovation, and community engagement, and resulted in innovative civic-tech tools, each with the potential to address a unique facet of AI misinformation.

In Ethiopia, recognising the fast-changing information environment, and the need for fact-checkers and researchers to move quickly while maintaining accuracy, transparency, and ethical care, another ADRF Grantee - Inform Africa - has expanded [two practical capabilities to address this reality](#): advanced OSINT-based fact-checking training and structured disinformation research using the DISARM framework.

As part of efforts to continue building the digital rights skills and knowledge of the legal fraternity, an ADRF partner - Rudi International - conducted Judiciary Training on Technology Law in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [The training](#) was held on the sidelines of the Congolese digital rights convening - [Haki Conf](#).



Image: Panelist During a discussion at Haki Conf2025

b) Digital Rights Alliance Africa (DRAA)

Through the Digital Rights Alliance Africa (DRAA), a pan-African coalition of civil society actors, technologists, academics, and legal practitioners, we deepened coordinated action on key digital rights issues including internet shutdowns, surveillance, child safety online, electoral integrity, and AI governance. This coalition allowed us to synthesise our research, legal analysis, and field-level monitoring into unified advocacy for rights-respecting governance.

Highlights of the DRAA-CIPESA collaboration in 2025:

- Hosted a [learning session](#) on understanding surveillance trends, threats and challenges for civil society in Africa. The learning session built capacity among the Alliance members to better understand digital surveillance, its regulatory environment, and strategies for democracy actors to navigate and counter surveillance risks and threats.
- Produced a [report](#) documenting the increasing use of internet shutdowns and network disruptions across Africa, particularly during elections and protests. The report finds that shutdowns reflect a growing trend of digital repression, and highlights the broader human rights and development implications of these disruptions.
- Our joint efforts resulted in the [2025 Digital Rights Monitoring Report](#), which provides an authoritative account of a growing trend of digital authoritarianism alongside emerging opportunities for rights-based digital governance. While Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, South Africa, and Ethiopia show advancements in data protection and digital policy frameworks, the report finds increasing restrictions on civic space through internet disruptions, surveillance, and controls on online expression across contexts including Ghana, Senegal, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe.
- Published 13 articles on internet shutdowns, data protection, digital governance, AI, and data governance. [See details here.](#)

c) Collective Advocacy to Promote Digital Rights

CIPESA continued to engage in collective advocacy efforts through joint statements, global forums, and expert convenings. By pooling the expertise of technologists, lawyers, and human rights defenders, we moved quickly to respond to regional crises and international concerns.

We helped shape the Johannesburg Declaration at the M20 Summit, contributing to drafting key provisions that address the global crisis in information integrity. The Declaration, which CIPESA [endorsed](#), underscores that independent journalism and access to reliable information are not merely media issues, but foundational public goods essential to peace, accountability, and the resilience of democratic governance.

We issued a joint statement titled “[Making AI More Participatory and Inclusive for the Benefit of All Africans](#)”, calling for inclusive and rights-based AI governance that meaningfully incorporates civil society, marginalised communities, and local stakeholders in shaping emerging technologies.

At the regional level, CIPESA joined 24 stakeholders in Kenya’s ICT sector in issuing a [joint statement](#) on the unlawful arrest, detention, and prosecution of software developer and civic activist Rose Njeri, reinforcing calls for protection of digital civic actors.

CIPESA also participated in the PILNet Global Forum, contributing to discussions on public interest law and digital rights, and engaging with global partners on legal strategies and accountability mechanisms for addressing emerging digital governance challenges.

2.5. Institutional Strengthening

a) Strategic Review and Pivot

In 2025, we undertook a strategic review and realignment process in response to changing global funding patterns, emerging digital risks, and the need to remain agile in a rapidly changing policy landscape. This review allowed us to thoroughly evaluate our impact and to consider means to address gaps in our geographic reach, visibility, and grassroots engagement. We also identified priority areas to guide our work, such as artificial intelligence governance, digital health, digital public infrastructure, and the socio-economic impacts of technology.

This strategic pivot reinforces CIPESA's position as a leading voice on digital rights in Africa and strengthens our ability to actively respond to emerging policy debates, broaden our partnerships, and refresh our operating models. By enhancing our influence across sectors, we are now more prepared to systematically integrate rights-based approaches in African countries' digital transformation efforts.

Looking ahead, we are implementing a new strategic framework based on six interlinked priorities: digital governance; digital rights and freedoms; digital equity and resilience; data governance; digital economy and the future of work; and ethical AI. These priorities will drive our evidence-based research, policy engagement, capacity strengthening, and multi-stakeholder collaboration, with a renewed focus on measurable impact and enhanced accountability. Together, they offer a focused and clear pathway for advancing an open, inclusive, and rights-respecting digital future for Africa.

b) Board Operations

The Board, as well as the three Board Committees (Finance, Programmes, and Human Resources), had a busy year, each meeting at least once every quarter to review budgets, work plans, strategies, and Management Reports. In line with the Board Work Plan for 2025, which prioritised institutional strengthening through policy development and review, several key organisational frameworks were either developed or updated.

The Board reviewed and approved both the Fundraising Strategy and the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Strategy, marking an important step in strengthening institutional effectiveness and sustainability. The Fundraising Strategy provides a structured approach to resource mobilisation, focusing on diversifying funding streams, strengthening donor engagement, and aligning partnerships with CIPESA's strategic priorities. The MEAL Strategy establishes a robust framework for tracking performance, measuring impact, and strengthening learning and accountability across programmes, including the use of evidence-based approaches such as outcome harvesting. Together, these strategies enhance institutional resilience and support more effective delivery and scaling of CIPESA's work.

c) Staff Retreat

The secretariat's annual strategic retreat was held on January 15-17, 2025. In addition to planning for the year, the retreat featured exercises on the second iteration of the Organisation Mapping Tool (OMT) and risk assessment, as well as a staff training on Anti-Money Laundering led by an expert from the Financial Intelligence Authority. The OMT assessed CIPESA on 13 areas: Programming, Learning and Evaluation, Advocacy, Field Engagement, External Communication, Governance, Finance Management, Fundraising and Donor Relations, Administration, Human Resource, Safety and security, Organisational Culture, and Network Leadership. The three areas that emerged as needing the most focus were External Communications, Fundraising and Donor Relations, and Human Resources. These focus areas have been included in the 2025 annual work plan for action.

Section 3:

Challenges and Strategic Responses

Constrained and shifting funding landscape. In response to reductions and shifts in donor funding, CIPESA prioritised high-impact thematic areas such as AI governance, digital public infrastructure, and data governance, while initiating efforts to diversify funding through partnerships, consultancy opportunities, and expanded engagement with non-traditional donors. This enabled continued delivery of core programmes while strengthening long-term sustainability.

Rapid technological change outpacing policy frameworks. To address widening governance gaps, CIPESA deepened its work on AI, DPI, and emerging technologies, while strengthening capacity-building initiatives targeting policymakers, journalists, and civil society actors. This ensured that stakeholders were better equipped to respond to complex and evolving digital risks.

Shrinking civic space and regulatory constraints. In contexts of increasing restrictions on digital expression, CIPESA reinforced its evidence-based advocacy, supported strategic litigation efforts, and amplified visibility of digital rights violations. This contributed to increased scrutiny of restrictive practices and supported safer, more informed engagement by civil society actors.



Image: Man climbing a mountain with a rope

Section 4:

Looking Ahead to 2026



Image: Man Looking through binoculars

Building on lessons from 2025, CIPESA will deepen its strategic focus on priority areas where it can deliver the greatest impact. This includes advancing rights-respecting governance of artificial intelligence, strengthening accountability in the deployment of DPI, and expanding work on business and human rights in the digital economy. CIPESA will also continue to generate evidence to inform policy, particularly in areas where technological adoption is outpacing regulatory safeguards.

A key priority will be strengthening the resilience and capacity of civil society, media, and public institutions to respond to emerging digital risks. CIPESA will scale its capacity building efforts to support stakeholders in navigating issues such as disinformation, surveillance, cybersecurity threats, and data governance. This includes expanding support to journalists, civil society organisations, and policymakers to engage more effectively in national, regional, and global digital governance processes.

In response to the evolving funding landscape, CIPESA will continue to operationalise its strategic pivot by prioritising efficiency, relevance, and sustainability. The organisation will deepen partnerships, strengthen its evidence-to-policy approach, and align its programming with emerging opportunities for influence. At the same time, CIPESA will leverage its Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) systems to enhance adaptive programming, demonstrate impact, and inform strategic decision-making.

CIPESA will also continue to play an active role in shaping regional and global digital governance processes, ensuring that African perspectives are reflected in emerging frameworks and standards. Through sustained engagement in platforms such as the WSIS+20 review, global AI governance discussions, and regional policy forums, the organisation will contribute to more inclusive and coordinated approaches to technology governance.

Annexes:

The DPI Journalism Fellowship

Across Eastern Africa, governments are rolling out digital systems from national identity platforms to cashless payment infrastructure that are reshaping how citizens access services, interact with the state, and exercise their rights. Yet for most people living under these systems, the decisions driving their design, governance, and implementation remain opaque. Journalists are among the few actors positioned to bridge that gap. Most, however, have had little training on the technical, legal, and governance dimensions of digital public infrastructure.

In May 2025, we launched the inaugural Digital Public Infrastructure Journalism Fellowship for Eastern Africa in partnership with Co-Develop. Selected through a competitive process, 20 journalists from nine countries (Burundi, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda) came together for a six-month programme combining specialised training, expert mentorship, and financial support to produce rigorous, multilingual stories on DPI and Digital Public Goods.

Learning to Ask the Right Questions

Over six months, fellows moved from foundational training on how digital public systems work, their architecture, their governance, and their risks to hands-on reporting. Workshop sessions deepened their understanding of data storytelling, explanatory and investigative journalism, and cross-border collaboration. Mentors with expertise in technology policy, data rights, and digital governance worked alongside fellows as their stories took shape.

For many, the training was transformative.

“Before the fellowship, I didn’t have a framework for asking the right questions about these systems. Now I know what to look for: who owns the data, who is excluded, who is accountable.”

Ronald Musoke, DPI Fellow, Uganda

The Stories Behind the Systems

The journalism that emerged covered terrain that mainstream media in the region rarely reaches. One fellow investigated how a national digital ID rollout in Uganda left hundreds of thousands of rural women and persons with disabilities without access to social protection payments, a human cost buried beneath official enrollment statistics. Other stories examined accountability gaps in government payment platforms and documented the experience of communities designed out of the systems meant to serve them. These were not abstract policy critiques. They were the stories of real people navigating systems built without them in mind.

Impact Already Visible

The Fellowship’s influence is already extending beyond publication. One story prompted a parliamentary question; another was cited in a civil society submission to a national data governance review. Fellows are not just reporting on digital governance; they are becoming part of the accountability that shapes it.

At a regional engagement in Nairobi, fellows presented findings from their investigations, the work sparked wider discussion among journalists, editors, policymakers, and civil society representatives from across Eastern Africa. This reinforced the Fellowship’s emerging role as a catalyst for informed public debate on digital transformation.

Why It Matters

Digital public infrastructure will define how millions of people across Africa access healthcare, education, financial services, and justice in the years ahead. Whether those systems are built with accountability, inclusion, and rights at their core depends, in part, on whether journalists can hold power to account and whether the public has access to the stories that matter.

Advancing Digital Rights in Uganda's Business Sector

Every day, businesses across Uganda collect customers' data, process digital payments, and store sensitive information, often with limited understanding of the rights attached to that data or the risks of getting it wrong. For many small and medium enterprises, digital rights have traditionally been viewed as a concern for regulators and legal experts, not for everyday business operations. CIPESA's work in 2025 challenged this perception, demonstrating that when businesses understand and respect digital rights, they not only reduce risk but build trust, resilience, and long-term value.

Through the Advancing Digital Rights by Businesses in Uganda project, CIPESA developed and disseminated a practical digital rights toolkit tailored to the realities of SMEs, business associations, and innovators. The toolkit translated complex concepts such as data protection, cybersecurity, and digital labour rights into actionable guidance that businesses could apply in their daily operations. Complementary research on emerging issues, including biometric data and surveillance, equipped stakeholders with the evidence needed to engage confidently in policy and regulatory discussions.

Implementation focused on reaching businesses and stakeholders across Busoga, Central, and Albertine regions, with targeted support for women- and youth-led enterprises. Through training, technical support, and partnerships with organisations such as the Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU) and Media Focus on Africa (MFA), CIPESA strengthened both individual and institutional capacity while fostering stronger linkages between the private sector, civil society, and government actors.

This shift is best captured in the voices of those directly engaged. One SME owner reflected:

“Before, I only cared about making sales and keeping customer records however I could. I didn't think about privacy or risks. Now, I understand that how I handle data affects my customers' trust and my business reputation.”

Similarly, a civil society partner noted:

“Previously, digital rights felt abstract when engaging businesses. Now we have the tools and language to connect these issues to real business risks and opportunities, and we're seeing more openness from the private sector.”

Elly Kasirye, Wakiso District Human Rights Committee.

In parallel, the #BeeraSharp campaign brought digital safety closer to everyday users through media engagement and hands-on resilience clinics, equipping individuals, journalists, and business owners with practical skills to navigate online risks. From recognising scams to understanding data breaches, the campaign reinforced that digital safety is not optional, it is essential.

The cumulative effect of these efforts is a visible shift in mindset and practice. Businesses are beginning to treat data protection and digital responsibility as core to their operations, while civil society and partners are more effectively integrating digital rights into advocacy and policy spaces. CIPESA is continuing to build on this momentum, leveraging strengthened networks, evidence, and partnerships to scale its Business and Human Rights work.



Allies





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