



Media Coverage of Digital Public Infrastructure and Digital Public Goods in Eastern Africa

October 2025

#DPIJournalism

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a baseline study on media coverage of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Digital Public Goods (DPGs) across seven Eastern African countries in 2024: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Using a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative content analysis and key informant interviews, the study analysed 680 DPI- and DPG-related stories published in 28 major print and online outlets between January and December 2024. It assessed the volume, prominence, themes, sourcing patterns, and framing of stories and complemented the findings with interviews and focus group discussions involving journalists, editors, and experts.

The study reveals that while media in the region are actively reporting on digital transformation, the coverage is largely event-driven, government-centric, and male-dominated. It focuses primarily on the functional benefits of DPI—such as service delivery and innovation—while giving limited attention to critical issues of governance, data privacy, equity, and citizen inclusion.

Key findings include:



- **Uneven media attention to DPI and DPGs:** Coverage varies significantly, with Tanzania (224 stories) and Kenya (199) leading, while South Sudan (53) and Rwanda (61) recorded the lowest volumes.
- **Superficial and Reactive Reporting:** The vast majority of stories are short, factual "hard news" reports triggered by official announcements. In-depth investigative, explanatory, or enterprise journalism is rare.
- **Narrow Sourcing and Framing:** Government officials are the dominant newsmakers and sources, accounting for over half of all voices. Perspectives from civil society, independent experts, and ordinary citizens are marginal.
- **Significant Gender Imbalance:** On average, men constitute 80% of all human sources, with Ethiopia recording no female sources in the stories monitored.
- **Thematic Gaps:** Coverage emphasises digital IDs, payment systems, and online portals, but under-reports on data privacy, policy governance, and equity.

Recommendations

Building a media ecosystem that reports on DPI and DPGs from a point of knowledge requires concerted action by all actors. Journalists and editors need capacity and resources; policymakers must guarantee transparency and access to information; civil society should amplify citizen perspectives; academic institutions can bridge research and practice; and development partners can provide sustained support for skills development and collaboration.

For Journalists and Newsrooms

- i. Invest in strengthening subject-matter knowledge on DPI and digital systems generally, and accompanying rights such as data protection, privacy, and inclusion, as well as governance principles such as transparency and accountability to support explanatory and investigative storytelling.
- ii. Diversify story types beyond straight news to include analytical features, explainers, and investigative follow-ups that unpack implications for citizens and governance.
- iii. Work to proactively broaden sourcing to include civil society, academic experts, innovators, and citizens, with deliberate attention to gender balance and inclusion.
- iv. Collaborate across borders through joint investigations or shared coverage of regional DPI issues (e.g., interoperability, data exchange, and privacy regimes).

For Editors and Media Owners

- i. Recognise DPI as a strategic public interest beat and assign dedicated reporters or desks for technology and digital governance.
- ii. Invest in newsroom capacity for in-depth, data-driven, and enterprise journalism.
- iii. Institutionalise diversity policies that promote gender balance in sourcing.
- iv. Forge partnerships with civil society, academia, and tech experts to strengthen accuracy and contextual depth.

For Civil Society Organisations

- i. Engage proactively with media by providing background materials, expert spokespersons, and easy-to-use resources on digital rights and governance.
- ii. Offer story grants, training, and mentorship to support journalists to produce in-depth DPI and DPG coverage.
- iii. Promote inclusion and accountability narratives that centre marginalised groups and citizens' experiences with digital systems.
- iv. Support media literacy initiatives that empower citizens to engage with DPI-related issues in informed ways.

For Policymakers and Regulators

- i. Promote transparency and access to information through open data, timely communication, and inclusive consultations.
- ii. Treat media as partners in promoting public understanding of digital transformation rather than as passive channels for official announcements.
- iii. Strengthen media relations and public communication capacities of government agencies to improve how they convey complex DPI initiatives.
- iv. Include civil society, academia, and media representatives in multi-stakeholder bodies overseeing DPI design and implementation.

For Donors and Development Partners

- i. Invest in long-term capacity-building for journalists and editors, focusing on digital governance, investigative reporting, and data analysis.
- ii. Support journalism fellowships and collaborative story grants for innovation and experimentation, such as multimedia storytelling, podcasts, or explainers that reach wider audiences.
- iii. Encourage partnerships between media, academia, and civil society to bridge research and reporting gaps.
- iv. Fund gender-responsive programmes that advance women's participation in digital journalism.

For Academic and Training Institutions

- i. Integrate digital governance and data literacy into journalism curricula and continuous professional development.
- ii. Conduct applied research on media coverage and its impact on public understanding of digital transformation.
- iii. Develop locally relevant case studies and training resources, potentially as Digital Public Goods, for use across the region.
- iv. Offer targeted short courses in data journalism, tech reporting, and digital ethics to address gaps identified.

For the Private Sector, Including Technology Companies, Developers, and Innovators

- i. Enhance openness and communication with the media by providing timely, accurate, and contextual information on digital innovations and infrastructure projects.
- ii. Develop media engagement strategies that go beyond product promotion to include public education on how digital systems work and their societal implications.
- iii. Support journalist training and access by offering background briefings, demos, or expert interviews that help reporters interpret complex technical developments accurately.
- iv. Collaborate with media and civil society to counter misinformation about digital services and promote responsible use of technology.

For the Public

- i. Engage actively with media content on digital transformation by reading, sharing, and discussing credible journalism on DPI and DPG issues.
- ii. Participate in media and civic dialogues (including radio talk shows, call-ins, online discussion forums) to make public voices part of the national digital conversation.
- iii. Demand accuracy and accountability from media, public officials, and the private sector by questioning misinformation and one-sided reporting on digital initiatives.
- iv. Collaborate with citizen journalism and fact-checking initiatives that promote transparency and credible public communication about digital transformation.



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