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# CIPESAFOCUS

PROMOTING EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE ICT POLICY IN AFRICA

## How ICT Could Drive Open Gov in Africa

By CIPESA Writer

Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) could be a key enabler of open government in Africa, in the wake of the September 20, 2011 launch of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a multilateral initiative that aims "to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance".

The African countries currently eligible to join the OGP are Kenya, Liberia, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda – and of them, by September 20, 2011, only Tanzania and Uganda had not indicated their plans to join the OGP. These countries derived their eligibility from their "demonstrated commitment to open government" in the key areas of budget transparency, access to information, asset disclosure by politicians and officials, and citizen engagement.

An increasingly large number of people in Africa are accessing modern communication technologies such as the internet and mobile phones. Indeed, at the citizen-to-citizen level, a lot of conversations and actions are taking place via ICT. Many of these ICT-enabled interactions and discussions are empowering citizens, enhancing civic agency and promoting participation in various ways which democratic governments need to nurture.

In East Africa, more so in Kenya and Uganda, social media are hugely popular, and have been proved to be a great mobilising tool which open government promoters should promptly embrace. More generally, given the central role ICT can play in enabling the attainment of the key objectives of open government, Africa needs to enable more of its people to access mobile phones and the internet. And governments

must take a lead in using ICT to improve openness, while also supporting civil society ICT-for-Open-Government initiatives.

Such initiatives, among others, include the Africa4All parliamentary initiative operational in Lesotho, Namibia, Tanzania and Uganda, which leverages on web 2.0 technologies to support collaboration and active engagement of MPs and citizens in the decision making process, and the East Africa ICT4Democracy Network that is working in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

Corruption, poor service delivery and undemocratic governance survive on systems that keep information hidden from the public, and bureaucracies which place near-unfettered power into the hands of the few public officials that control this information. Becoming open would require the currently closed African governments to briskly get online in service provision and in pro-actively placing a wide array of information in the public domain.

Moreover, citizens need to be empowered to hold their leaders and public service institutions to account. The countries which have taken a lead in this area recognise that freedom of information represents the citizens' right to know; and that access to government information enhances public participation, while also enabling more robust scrutiny and discussion of government actions.

For Africa, passing and effecting progressive legislation that guarantees access to information is crucial. So is the need for public bodies to enter and respect citizens' charters. Besides, concerted efforts to create civic awareness and to enable citizens' active participation in fighting corruption and monitoring democracy will be crucial. And smartly embracing ICT would catalyse all these efforts. To read CIPESA's September 2011 Briefing on Open Government in Africa, please visit [www.cipesa.org/research-reports-a-briefings/doc\\_download/36-cipesa-open-government-in-africa-brief](http://www.cipesa.org/research-reports-a-briefings/doc_download/36-cipesa-open-government-in-africa-brief).

**".....to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance".**

## Tanzania Should Support Its Netizens

By Lillian Nalwoga

Tanzanian citizens are increasingly using social media networks to share information and, to a lesser extent, demand more transparency in the conduct of public affairs. But there are concerns about the apparent intolerance by Tanzanian authorities of online activity deemed critical of the government.

For over 40 years, Tanzania under the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party has enjoyed political stability and national unity more than most of the country's neighbours. However, the October 2010 election won by incumbent president Jakaya Kikwete saw CCM's popularity slide from 80.2% of the vote in December 2005 to 61.2%.

This decline seems to have brought with it

a worrying intolerance for critical media, both online and offline. Journalists have been intimidated and harassed by state officials for questioning the government's democratic credentials. Some political and social demonstrations have been repressed. To fight this new authoritarianism, several Tanzanians, including politicians, have resorted to social media to express their views.

The country has laws that seem to improve citizens' rights to information and the freedom of expression, parts of the legislation are restrictive. Article 18 of the Tanzanian Constitution for instance guarantees the right to freedom of expression, and to seek, receive and impart information. These constitutional guarantees are insufficiently implemented in the Tanzanian domestic legislation. Besides, the government has been implicated in attempts to block websites and weblogs whose content it perceives

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# Tanzania's Netizens

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as a threat.

Despite the above scenario, Tanzanian web forums such as Jamiiforums (<http://www.jamiiforums.com/>) serve as citizens' channels to comment on key issues such as corruption. The website editors have been interrogated on numerous occasions over issues that government has considered sensitive information. Unconfirmed reports have also surfaced that the Tanzanian government is attempting to clone these forums to portray information that befits it.

Social media has also played a part in sharing vital information about sensitive topics in Tanzania. Such a case was the Gongo la Mbotto blasts that killed over 20 people and injured at least 184 people in the Dar es Salaam army base in February 2011.

Although army officials declined to discuss the cause of the blasts, netizens captured events of the blasts by uploading and sharing photos of victims. Tanzanian twitters using #BombsInDar shared information about the possible causes of the blast while calling on government to investigate their cause. The netizens demanded the resignation of the Minister of Defence, a call supported by the country's opposition.

This rise in use of social media can perhaps be attributed to the growth in internet penetration from 5% in 2005 to 11% in June 2010 (Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority statistics). In addition, there are 21 million mobile phone subscribers.

The Tanzania government needs to make information more accessible to the public for transparency and accountability, as well as to invest in infrastructure, literacy, policy and regulatory frameworks to boost internet usage in empowering citizens.

## IN CIPESAFOCUS next quarter:

- The global Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Nairobi, Kenya
- Progress on the ICT4Democracy in East Africa initiative
- The Information Economy Report (IER) 2011

# CIPESA Spearheads Uganda's 4th Internet Gov Forum

By Lillian Nalwoga

The Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern (CIPESA) in conjunction with the Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) and Hive Colab organised the 4th Uganda Internet Governance Forum (IGF) under the theme "Harnessing Internet Development". The forum was held on August 10, 2011 at Hive Colab premises in Kampala, brought together over 50 ICT enthusiasts. The Uganda IGF is a multi-stakeholder forum open to representatives from Government, NGOs, academia, private sector, as well as any other entities and individuals interested in Internet Governance issues.

Key issues discussed at the 4th Uganda IGF included cyber security management; the power of social media in citizen empowerment; importance of cloud computing in promoting e-commerce in Uganda; adopting

developed and would be made accessible to the public in due course.

Participants discussed the Ugandan cyber laws which the President assented to six months ago. These included the Electronic Transactions Act, the Electronic Signatures Act and the Computer Misuse Act. Copies of these laws are now available for purchase from major bookshops. However, only the Computer Misuse Law is operational while regulations for the others have not yet been developed. Nevertheless, participants called for massive awareness creation for these laws as many citizens were not aware about their existence and their implications.

Meanwhile, Gloria Katuku, an official of the ICT Ministry, highlighted key strategies under development, which she said included the National Information Security Strategy to be implemented by NITA-U; the IPv6 strategy,



UIGF at Hive Colab Kampala - August 2011

the best model of internet for Uganda and the management of Uganda's Critical Internet Resources.

In his opening remarks, James Saaka, the Executive Director of the National Information and Technology Authority Uganda (NITA-U) said that Phase one of the District Business Information Centres had been complemented while Phase Two was underway.

Saaka also said that Phase one of the National Backbone Infrastructure/E-Government Infrastructure (NBI/EGI) project had been completed. Phase Two was scheduled for completion this year September and would involve the laying of 1,477 KM of additional Optical Fibre Cable in the districts of Mbale, Kumi, Soroti, Lira, Gulu, Nimule, Masindi, Hoima, Kyenjojo, Fort Portal, Kasese, Bushenyi, Mbarara, Nakasongola and Luwero. A map detailing the project coverage will soon be available on the NITA-U website. He further welcomed feedback from stakeholders, noting that a repository about government ICT projects was being

awaiting approval from the ICT Minister and the Dot Ug ccTLD Management strategy, which is available on the Ministry Website [www.ict.go.ug](http://www.ict.go.ug) for comments.

Participants called for the adoption of new ICT tools for communicating and engaging with the government on national matters. They called for the adoption of an internet model that was free and open for all to access. This includes embracing the power of mobile internet hence the need for government to increase mobile penetration by lowering Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) of mobile phones. Measures such as removal of import duties and Value added Tax (VAT) on mobile devices should also be considered by government, they said.

The outcomes of the 4th Uganda IGF were presented by CIPESA at the regional East African IGF which took place in Kigali, Rwanda on August 17 –18, 2011. Presentations from the Uganda IGF are available at the CIPESA website, [www.cipesa.org](http://www.cipesa.org).

# Here's How Social Media Could Promote Democracy

By Ashnah Kalemera

Social media is fast becoming one of the major uses of the Internet. Wikis, blogs and other social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube have been added to the Internet as enablers for developing, storing and disseminating instant information to audiences of people in diverse locations at a fairly low cost.

Social networks could potentially be used for a broad range of participatory activities, such as demanding for public services like education and water, contacting leaders, political campaigns and discussions, and fighting corruption. They also could play a critical role in citizen engagement and advocacy, which have a major bearing on transparency and accountability in governance and the conduct of public affairs.

With growing numbers of Africans becoming internet users, monthly web information analysis by Alexa.com shows that there are a significant – and rising - number of users of social media on the continent. Facebook, a social networking platform that allows highly interactive processes, claims that it has 750 million users, half of whom log on daily with the average user having an estimated 130 friends.

In June this year, Alexa.com ranked Facebook the second most visited site in the world. The site was ranked the most popular for social networking in Egypt, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Morocco, Nigeria and Sudan. In Algeria, Cameroon, Congo, South Africa and Uganda, Facebook was ranked the second most used website.

Twitter, another social networking

and micro blogging service with instant dissemination of up to 140 character strokes, has also greatly attracted citizens and policy makers on the continent. Ranked the 9th most popular social networking website globally by Alexa.com, it was widely used by South Africans, Nigerians, Kenyans and Ugandans, taking 7th or 8th position of these countries' internet traffic.

Overall, users of social networking sites form a network that provides a powerful means of sharing, organising, and finding con-



tent and contacts. Citizens, with the capacity to undertake independent analysis of issues, form opinions and influence others, and can leverage on social media for policy engagement. This engagement can be with other citizens as well as with their leaders. For instance, administration complaints can be made more easily by directing them to public institutions' Facebook accounts or by mentioning them on Twitter.

For governance in particular, infor-

mation flow through the smooth collaboration of information providers could help in overcoming various institutional problems such as graft. Citizens' and governments' use of social media platforms translates into becoming bound to one another through exposure to a common class of problems, pursuit of joint solutions and thereby embracing 'change'. With more and more applications being developed by individuals and groups, social media stands to become even more interactive, far-reaching and viral.

However, most African governments have not taken significant steps toward making the use of social media and networks within administrations official and widespread. In fact, the policy environment remains un-conducive with most government Internet related regulations aimed at protecting political interests at the expense of enabling citizen participation.

Ultimately, the prospects and potential of social media remain anchored in the complexity that is the socio-economic, technological, political and cultural environment. Access to the internet, ability to effectively use diverse media tools, as well as time and security issues and citizens' knowledge of how best to use the mediums, will determine how much civic participation, transparency and efficient public service delivery can thrive via the social mediums available.

Although social media networks are unlikely to replace traditional policy and governance processes in Africa, it is undoubtable that they can effectively contribute to meaningful citizen motivation, sensitisation, education, mobilization and ultimately, influence. What is required is for governments to leverage on these technologies in service and information delivery.

## 'ICT4Democracy in East Africa' Project Launched

Recently, we have seen a number of projects, pilots and tools where ICT is used in various ways to promote democracy. Many of these initiatives have been launched in East Africa: crowd-sourcing platforms such as Ugan-dawatch2011, uReport and Ushahidi (and variations thereof such as Uchaguzi, Huduma and Map Kibera); innovative SMS applications such as Grid 6464, CU@SCHOOL, 3356 shortcode by City Council in Nairobi and Trac FM; and of course the widespread use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

We have also seen some challenges in ICT enabled democracy projects emerge: lack of government involvement, too much government involvement (i.e. surveillance, filtering and censorship), low community involvement and problems sustaining the community involvement over time, expensive mar-

keting strategies and reaching out campaigns, lack of visibility, how to show impact... The list can be made long.

In November 2010, Spider together with Association for Progressive Communications (APC), organized a Governance Stakeholder Workshop in Kampala, Uganda and invited East African organizations who could bring in important and valuable insight to the area of ICT, democracy and development. Following this workshop, Spider received concept papers and project proposals in the field of ICT and democracy and after reviewing the applications, identified several overlaps and areas in the project proposals that could benefit from a collaborative and stronger ICT for democracy program. The aim of the program is to synergise and compliment the individual projects with the ambition of possibly creating a net-

work hub that deals in democracy through the use of ICTs.

A follow-up two-day workshop in Kampala in May 2011 brought together partners with various strengths who all lauded the idea of a program and expanding their individual existing networks. The Partners have different expertise that together will create greater impact.

Partners in the network are the Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET); Transparency International Uganda (TIU); The Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East & Southern Africa (CIPESA); iHub (Kenya), the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and Tanzania's Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance (CHRAGG). *This is an abridged version of an article that appeared in the Spider newsletter, June 28, 2011*

## Calendar of Events

**FutureGov Congress Australia 2011**  
National Convention Center,  
Australia:  
September 12 - 14, 2011

**Internet Society - INET Conference**  
Cotonou, Benin:  
September 14 - 16, 2011

**2011 Internet Governance Forum**  
Nairobi, Kenya:  
September 27 - 30 September 2011

**International Institute of Communications**  
Annual Conference 2011  
Johannesburg, South Africa:  
October 03 - 04 October, 2011

**Television White Spaces Spectrum in Africa**  
Workshop  
Johannesburg, South Africa:  
October 05, 2011

**The Third International Conference on**  
Social Informatics (SocInfo'11),  
Singapore:  
October 06 - 08, 2011

**Internet Corporation for Assigned Names**  
and Number (ICANN) 42  
Dakar Senegal:  
October 23 - 28, 2011

**ICT Africa Summit 2011**  
Capetown, South Africa:  
October 24 - 26, 2011

**Information Communication**  
Technologies for Rural Development  
(ICT4RD) 2011  
Johannesburg, South Africa:  
November 01 - 03, 2011

**Africa Com: Advancing Innovation &**  
Profitability for a Digital Africa - CTICC  
Cape Town, South Africa:  
November 09 - 10, 2011

## Uganda: The Challenge of Accessing Public Information

The inhabitants of Bushenyi District in Uganda have seen their right to access information blatantly violated by public bodies; reflecting the plight of thousands of ordinary citizens who wish to hold their leaders accountable.

Unusual and suspicious delays in the execution of a contract to build a new stadium in the District of Bushenyi amid rumours that the District had issued certificates against which payments were made when work had not been done prompted this community led by Civil Society Forum, a local NGO, on December 8, 2009 to demonstrate and file a series of requests for access to documents related to the contract.

The first request was made to District Local Governments with copies to the Resident District Commissioner, the President's representative at district level whose duty is, amongst others, to monitor government programmes on the President's behalf.

With a mute response from local authorities, the residents again led by Civil Society Forum brought the matter to the attention of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of the Office of the Prime Minister as well as the Department of Ethics and Integrity, Office of the President in December 2010. Still these efforts did not help citizens get the documents or the contract executed as required.

The contract entailed improving and constructing a stadium in the district at the cost of 906 million Ugandan Shillings (about \$ 377 500). It was awarded in 2005 to HABA Construction Company, an entity owned by Mr. Hassan Bassajabalaba, a member of the NRM Central Executive Committee, the ruling party's top policy organ.

Facing these huge obstacles to enjoying their constitutional right to information, this community had to seek external help. The Human Rights Network of Uganda (HURINET) stepped in and joined the CSO Forum to take the matter to court in the beginning of 2011. On the scheduled date of the hearing, HURINET lawyers were ready and attended court

but hearing did not take place because the Chief Magistrate was reportedly sick.

In a letter dated 10th May 2011 (but received in July 2011) the District finally yielded to pressure and responded by providing, among others, the architectural plan of the stadium, the four certificates of completion, contract agreement with bills of quantities and evidence of payments made. According to these documents, the contractor did not only receive the contracted sum but also took the Local Government to Court and won an additional 40 million Ugandan Shillings (about \$16 667) for breach of contract yet very little work had been done. Following the filing of the case in court by CSOs the District Local Government contracted another company Rose ST to complete the works.

These developments may be a victory for access to information, but they also confirm how far mindsets in public institutions need to change from secrecy to openness to ensure effective enforcement of Uganda's access to information legislation.

Concerns similar to that of Bushenyi were the basis for information requests made by Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC) to the Uganda Land Commission, Ministry of Education and Sports as well as the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. All the three public bodies have refused access and have never reported to Parliament on information requests received in compliance with Section 43 of the Access to Information Act.

It is not clear why the Auditor General has never raised questions. There is also no information as to why the Resident District Commissioner, the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Ethics and Integrity did not act on the reports by the Western Civil Society Forum. It remains to be seen if the Inspector General of Government will take interest in the matter now that records have been made available and clearly something went wrong somewhere. – *Republished with the kind permission of AFIC, www.africafoicentre.org.*

## ABOUT CIPESA

The Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) is one of two centres established under the Catalysing Access to Information and Communications Technologies in Africa (CATIA) initiative and funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID), but now is self sustaining. CIPESA raises awareness, provides useful information and stirs debate by sparking discussion and convening productive gatherings on the issues of Information and Communications Technology and development.

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