

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Digital Rights Hub for African CSOs

The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) in conjunction with the Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA) is pleased to invite applications from representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), lawyers and human rights defenders (HRDs) interested in pursuing collective advocacy strategies to address and respond to current and emerging threats to digital freedoms in Africa.

Successful applicants will constitute a “Digital Rights Hub” – a community of practice and strategic platform that will bring together traditional CSOs, lawyers and HRDs from across Africa to actively advance an enabling digital civic space on the continent. The Hub will aim to; (i) promote enabling legal and policy frameworks governing digital rights at the national or local level, including through pushing back against current and emerging legislative threats/restrictions; and (ii) enhance civil society’s ability to exercise digital rights through targeted awareness creation and capacity building initiatives, research, strategic litigation, and engagement with multilateral mechanisms at the regional and international level.

ICNL and CIPESA will hold the pilot Digital Rights Hub training on September 26-27, 2023, in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. The training will focus on exploring the conceptual framework underpinning digital rights. It will aim to expand and enhance knowledge and understanding of current and emerging digital themes including surveillance technologies, disinformation, artificial intelligence, internet shutdowns and their impact on civil society’s work. It will also provide an opportunity for the development of advocacy strategies to push back against restrictive laws and practices.

Participants will also have the opportunity to network with digital rights actors during the [Forum on Internet Freedom in Africa \(FIFAfrica\) 2023](#) that will be held on September 28-29, 2023 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Participation at FIFAfrica23 will enable participants to learn from a diverse cohort of policy makers, regulators, human

rights defenders, academia, law enforcement representatives, media, and other sector players on strategies, lessons and experiences that can further inform the Hub's strategic engagements. Participants are required to be actively involved in the Hub's work including shaping the initiatives that will be implemented within the Hub.

ICNL and CIPESA will cover costs for participation at the pilot training and FIFAFrica23 including flights, accommodation, meals, and incidental expenses.

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis and are due by **September 10, 2023**, at 11:00 pm, East African Time (EAT).

Background

The digital era has transformed the ways in which civil society mobilizes, engages, and cultivates its operations. It presents new avenues for advocacy on human rights, social justice, governance, and rule of law issues both locally and beyond. Over the past decade, CSOs have equally been instrumental in leveraging digital technologies as a means to advance social, political and economic issues of concern, thereby facilitating active citizen participation in public affairs at the national level.

Despite the opportunities presented by digital platforms, civil society actors have been increasingly targeted by state and non-state actors who continue to impose undue restrictions to control access to, and use of, online platforms. Barriers affecting the enjoyment of digital freedoms by CSOs have manifested through the adoption and application of legal and extra-legal restrictions such as punitive cybercrime laws, digital surveillance tools, arbitrary internet shutdowns or throttling and bans on social media apps, which undermine civil society's ability to work safely and effectively online. Furthermore, as trends continue to show, threats to digital freedoms become more pronounced during sensitive democratic periods such as elections and mass protests. As a result, CSO voices are at a higher risk of being targeted by state actors in the absence of adequate legal protection.

Accordingly, the Digital Rights Hub is a new initiative that seeks to create a network of traditional CSOs who are equipped to understand the conceptual framework for digital rights in order to better respond to opportunities and restrictions in the digital realm, share experiences and coordinate strategic actions for positive change on a regular and timely basis. At the end of the inaugural hub training, participants will develop priority actions and develop an action plan that will inform follow-up actions.

Application Instructions

Individuals (including CSO representatives, lawyers and HRDs) should submit an application of **no more than 2 pages** with the following details:

- (i) Applicant's level of experience working in the civil society sector including prior engagement on civic space issues.
- (ii) Why the hub would be a valuable platform for your work, such as relevance to any existing, related initiatives that you are undertaking to ensure complementarity to the Hub's vision and work.
- (iii) Proposed initiatives that you will undertake to apply the acquired skills and knowledge.
- (iv) How you would contribute towards the Hub's overall sustainability and impact in the immediate and long term.

Eligibility Requirements

- This call for applications is open to representatives of civil society organizations, lawyers and HRDs operating in the Sub-Saharan Africa region.
- Availability to travel on the abovementioned dates: September 24-30, 2023.
- Fluency in English

This opportunity is available to ten individuals whose applications will be successful. Applicants representing special interest groups including women HRDs, LGBTI groups, persons with disabilities are encouraged to apply.

Selection Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on the following factors:

- Compliance with eligibility requirements and application procedures.
- Applicant's experience working on civic space issues to advance fundamental freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, expression, and public participation.
- Likelihood that the proposed initiatives will advance digital rights at country and/or regional level.
- Quality of application, including innovativeness and related initiatives that can complement the Hub's work to ensure sustainability; and
- Relevance of proposed strategies to particular groups and/or communities.

How to Apply

Interested applicants can apply by submitting the application along with your **resume/CV** by email to africa@icnl.org. Please ensure that the subject of your email is "Digital Hub Application."

Deadline

Applicants should submit their applications no later than September 10, 2023, at 11pm, EAT. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.

About the Organizers

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT LAW (ICNL)

ICNL works with civil society organizations, governments, and the international community in more than 100 countries to improve the legal environment for civic space around the world. We believe that when people have the space to come together, positive, lasting change can be made. To achieve this vision, individuals must be able to join together, speak out and take action to make the world a better place. Since 1992, ICNL has worked with local partners to promote and protect an enabling legal environment for civil society. Our international staff includes experts in all aspects of the laws governing free association, assembly, and expression, spanning from the local to global contexts. We also foster a worldwide network of organizations and individuals with in-depth expertise on a diverse range of issues relevant to civil society. Learn more about our work and browse our research at www.icnl.org.

COLLABORATION ON INTERNATIONAL ICT POLICY FOR EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA (CIPESA)

CIPESA is a leading center for research and analysis aimed at enabling governance and human rights stakeholders in the region to understand Information and Communications Technology (ICT) policy issues. Our work responds to a shortage of information, resources and actors consistently working at the nexus of technology, human rights and society. Our thematic areas are digital rights, civic participation, data governance, digital resilience, the digital economy, and digital inclusion. At the heart of all our work is building a just and equitable society where all individuals access and use technology to gain opportunities and participate in public affairs. See some of our work here: <https://cipesa.org>.