2021

CIPESA
Annual Report

CIPESA

Contents

2021: A Test of Agility

The year 2021 was a difficult one. We had learnt a lot during 2020 about living with Covid-19 and adapted to new ways of working, living, and engaging. However, 2021 came with unanticipated challenges that made it particularly difficult to continue with our work and life as earlier envisaged. In the first quarter of 2021, a vicious wave of the Omicron variant hit many countries where we work, prompting governments to re-impose restrictions on travel and gatherings. The Covid-19 response measures and standard operating procedures (SOPs) continued to dictate how project activities were run. This called for us to respond with dexterity in how we approached our work, as uncertainty loomed in the midst of the pandemic.

Besides affecting activities that required physical interaction, the control measures also hampered the speed of accomplishing activities, such as research, which required speaking to individuals, many of whom could not easily be reached in office or online. CIPESA leveraged online engagements to mitigate these challenges and worked closely with in-country partners to execute activities. By the end of the year, most restrictions had been lifted, allowing for a resumption of physical engagements, including training and advocacy meetings.

For the second year, the Forum on Internet Freedom in Africa (FIFAfrica) took a hybrid format, with online events and six remote hubs in five countries – the Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Several partners joined FIFAfrica as supporters, organisers of events, or speakers, helping to maintain FIFAfrica's standing as the largest African gathering on digital rights. The Forum drew 900 registrants.

Indeed, CIPESA continued to be a thought leader and network builder, helping to expand the network of actors engaged in advancing a free and open internet, including the rights to free expression and access to information online. The Africa Digital Rights Fund (ADRF), which we launched in 2019, plays a pivotal role in this regard by supporting digital rights work across the continent through flexible and rapid response grants. As at August 2021, the ADRF had supported 45 initiatives with a cumulative sum of USD 564,000. The Fund supports organisations and networks to implement activities that promote digital rights, including advocacy, litigation, research, policy analysis, skills development and movement building.

The Covid-19 control measures continued to contribute to a shrinkage in civic space in various countries, although coups, internal conflicts and botched elections played their own part. Thus, a growing number of states in the region fell short of living up to their citizens' democratic expectations as they implemented measures to fight the pandemic. Indeed, in the Democracy Index for 2020, the number of authoritarian regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa rose from 22 to 24 – more than half of the 44 countries in the region that the index covered. In 2021, the authoritarian states were 23.

As many countries continued to register a shrinking digital rights space, criminalisation of speech online, internet disruptions, surveillance, arrests and prosecution of social media users, and abuse of citizens' data rights became key planks in undermining free expression and civic participation. This scenario is undermining the democratising potential of the internet and its role as a safe bastion for organising and free expression towards pluralistic and democratic societies. Some of these measures - such as trolling and cyberbullying - target critical democracy actors, including women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and journalists, and have far-reaching impacts on rights protection and democratic participation. These are some of the challenges that CIPESA work focussed on and will continue to focus on.

In 2021, CIPESA got a new Board of Directors, whose members are based in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Dr. Marjorie Kyomuhendo was elected Chairperson, deputised by Dr. Wanjiru Mburu. Other members are Mr. Moses Odokonyero, Ms. Ayeta Wangusa, and Dr. Abdul Busuulwa. The Board is keen on addressing some of the organisation's pressing challenges, such as diversifying CIPESA's funding sources and attracting more core funding, as well as institutional strengthening. With the guidance of such a strong, diverse and experienced Board, and the support of our wide network of supporters and partners, our work going forward can only be brighter.

The **CIPESA Team**

CIPESA
Highlights By Numbers

Over
USD 568,000
Granted through the Africa
Digital Rights Fund Grants

**2021 edition of the
Forum on Internet
Freedom in Africa**
(#FIFAfrica21)

2400
minutes of video
captured

over
3 days *dedicated to debate,
discussion and insights on
internet freedom in Africa*

*registered
attendees
of the Forum*
900

1,800
civic, political or election related
hashtags related to the Uganda
2021 elections were tracked

Over **2 million**
*hashtagged tweets were
consequently analysed*

Assessed **10**
Telecom companies in
five countries
(Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria,
South Africa, and Uganda)

3 Universal Periodic
Review submissions
(Uganda, South Sudan, Zimbabwe)

Mapped the prevalent forms of
surveillance, the laws and policies that
aid surveillance, and the impact of state
surveillance in **11** African countries:
Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique,
Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda,
Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Levelling Up:
Digital Security Assesment and Skills Development

120 staff of the participating organisations benefitted from safety and security on social media training sessions

Technologists supported

Ethiopia **3**

South Sudan **1**

Uganda **8**

Tanzania **4**

Kenya **3**

4 Sexual minorities

1 Environmental /resource extraction

3 Feminist/women's rights organisations

1 Information access

1 Journalists /media

6 Human rights, democracy, human rights defenders

Organisations supported

2 South Sudan

1 Ethiopia

1 Kenya

4 Tanzania

8 Uganda

7 Female

12 Male
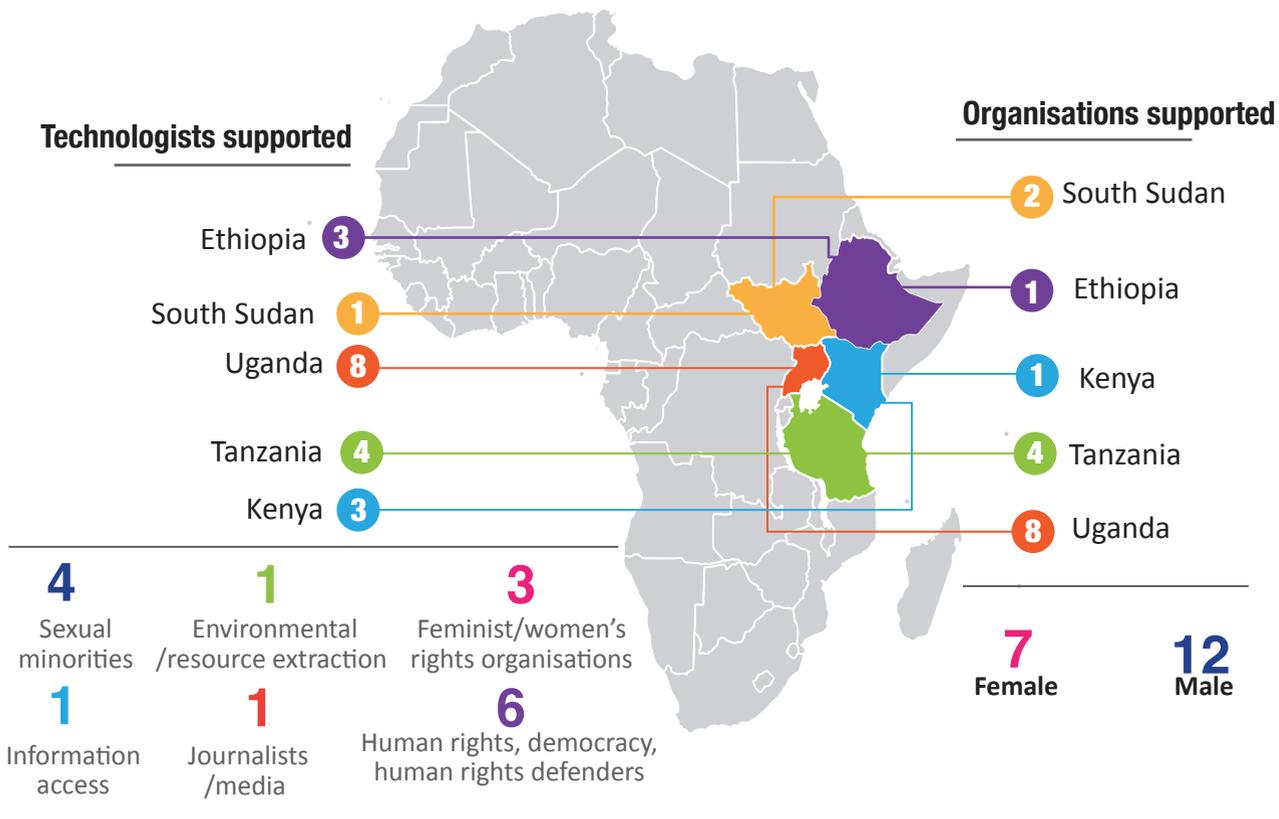
How State Surveillance is Stifling
Democratic Participation in Africa

According to our *2021 State of Internet Freedom in Africa Report*, surveillance has become a principal threat to digital rights in Africa. One of the "democratising effects" of the internet was that it had provided a safe and alternative engagement platform that could help circumvent and diminish the repressive state's control over the means of communication, thereby enabling greater organising and expression of dissenting opinions. However, autocrats in the region have appropriated the power of digital technologies to stifle dissent and to ramp up their capabilities to snoop on, punish, and silence critical and dissenting forces.

The report was launched at the Forum on Internet Freedom in Africa (FIFAfrica), which was for a second successive year held as a hybrid event. See *video* and statistics.

African States Continue
To Undermine the Use of Encryption

In commemoration of the inaugural *Global Encryption Day*, we published a *policy brief* that highlighted restrictions to encryption and what needs to be done by governments in Africa to promote the use of encryption. The brief shows that encryption laws and government practices in several countries undermine the privacy rights of citizens, which in turn hampers their right to free expression and to secure use of digital technologies.
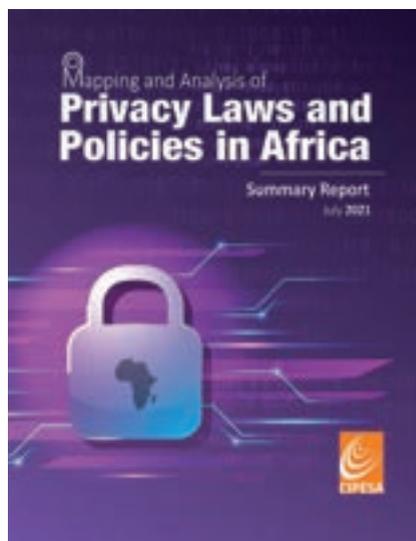
The brief urges governments to repeal or amend provisions that place undue restrictions on the use of encryption tools; cease blanket compelled service providers and intermediary assistance to state agents and instead provide for clear and activity-bound assistance; and enact data protection and privacy laws that robustly promote the use of strong encryption.

We also produced a *research report* which analysed laws and policies that impact on privacy, notably those that regulate surveillance, data localisation, biometric data collection, and encryption. This research covered 19 countries – Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.

Over USD 500 000 Distributed
Under the Africa Digital Rights Fund Grants

Now in its second year, the latest round brings to USD 564,000, the total amount awarded by ADRF to 45 initiatives working to advance digital rights across the continent. A total of USD 150,000 was *awarded to 13 entities* under the fifth round of the Africa Digital Rights Fund (ADRF) in 2021.

In the *inaugural round* of ADRF, initiatives with activities spanning 16 African countries received a total of USD 65,000. *The second call* for applications saw a total of *USD 152,000 awarded to 14 initiatives* to advance digital rights through various projects in 18 African countries. In its *third round*, the ADRF awarded *USD 138,000 to 11 initiatives* responding to the digital rights fallout from the fight against Covid-19.

In February we partnered with the *Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)* and issued a *call to support select current or previous ADRF grantees* to deploy a six-month policy advocacy campaign that furthers the conversation on internet freedom. Eight current or previous grantees of the Africa Digital Rights Fund (ADRF) were awarded grants totalling *USD 63,000 to scale their digital rights policy advocacy efforts* spread across six countries – Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal and Somalia.

USD 568,000
Total Ammount Awarded

45 initiatives supported

39 Countries Covered

Round One 65,000

Round Two 152,000

Round Three 138,000

Round Four 63,000

Round Five 150,000

CIPESA Fellows and Associates Tackle Digital Rights, **Covid-19, Data Governance and Knowledge Societies**

Botswana is working on shifting from a minerals-led to a knowledge-based economy. The government is implementing reforms aimed at expanding employment and making the country's products and services more competitive globally. CIPESA Fellow Hopeton Dunn wrote that, in its *quest to be a knowledge-based society*, the country is falling short in some areas that could affect this aspiration.

CIPESA Fellow Dunia Tegnegen explored the challenges citizens in Africa face in accessing crucial information during elections, particularly when governments block the internet in an attempt to stifle their citizens' ability to seek and share information. See the policy brief on *Why Access to Information is Essential for Democratic Elections in Africa.*

In West Africa, Afia Edoh noted that as Covid-19 cases grew in Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, governments and the private sector played a notable role in these countries' technology-based response measures, including those aimed at minimising the social-economic impact of the pandemic. See her commentary: *Tech to the Rescue Against Covid-19: Reflections from West Africa.* Astou Diouf wrote on *intermediary liability in Senegal highlighting (French version)* the legal and regulatory environment relevant to intermediaries' obligations including information/ data disclosure to law enforcement authorities, filtering or blocking content, and service restrictions.

Meanwhile, Tusi Fokane studied South Africa's readiness for electronic voting to comply with social distancing and other movement restrictions. She wrote about *South Africa's parliament rejecting plans to Introduce e-Voting.*

North of the continent, another Fellow, Mohamed Farahat, explored how the Covid-19 pandemic has deepened the digital exclusion of refugees. He wrote about the need to work on *Promoting Digital Inclusion for Refugees Amid the Covid-19 Crisis in Egypt.*

See more about the CIPESA Fellows *here*

Putting Digital
Inclusion Data into Practice

In 2020, four of Africa's leading digital companies (Safaricom, Jumia, MTN, and Naspers) were ranked and scored on digital inclusion by the World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA)'s *Digital Inclusion Benchmark.* The results showed that commitment and contribution towards digital inclusion are highly uneven across industries in the digital sector. Clear and consistent support to improve digital skills is needed, especially for vulnerable and underrepresented groups. These results echoed similar sentiment in the CIPESA's *Access Denied* report, which showed that several telecom companies in Sub-Saharan Africa have failed to meet their obligations to provide information and services to persons with disabilities.

As such, in June 2021, the WBA and CIPESA *hosted a roundtable* with stakeholders committed to advancing digital inclusion in the region. The roundtable sought to foster coordinated multi-stakeholder actions on digital inclusion that can help the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Only **15**/150 companies demonstrated the basics of human rights due diligence
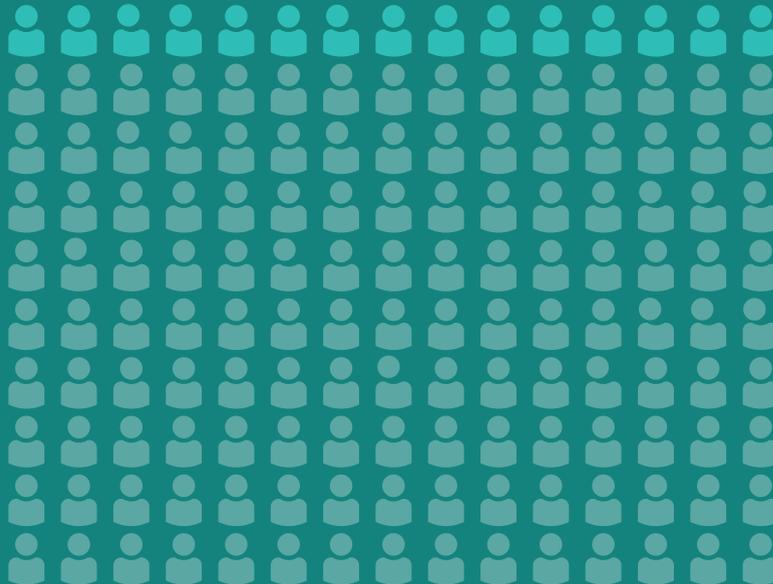
Skilling Distributed Digital Security
Trainers Amidst The Pandemic

Amidst increased attacks on digital rights activists, journalists, and human rights defenders (HRDs) during the Covid-19 pandemic, it has become crucial to grow the capacity of these actors to operate securely. A key concern is that, in many African countries, skills in digital security and safety are lacking among some of the most at-risk groups, yet trainers and support networks are in short supply.

Without adequate digital security capacity, activists and HRDs are not able to meaningfully continue advocacy and engagements around human rights, transparent and accountable governance, during and in the aftermath of Covid-19. Accordingly, through the *Level-Up programme,* we provided security support to various HRD organisations in Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Sudan and Uganda. The initiative also entailed a Training of Trainers (ToT) component – to grow the network of individuals and organisations that offer digital security training and support to journalists, activists, and HRDs, and organisational security assessments. The sectors covered through this work included: sexual minorities, Environmental/resource extraction, women's rights organisations, information access entities, media, as well as human rights defenders. See more about this work *here.*

Following the initial training on organisational security assessments, the technologists led assessments to determine the status, challenges, past and potential future threats, and attacks on organisations, as well as the capacity of the organisations.

The findings of the assessments indicated a need to bolster capacity, organisational practices, and implementation of security and safety measures related to social media platforms usage by the organisations and staff. Several organisations reported losing access to their brand assets, experiencing hacking, and harassment on social media platforms.

To this end, a Social Media Asset Continuity and Security Tool was designed and another training for technologists conducted focused on 1) Continuity of organisation control of organisational Facebook/Twitter/Whatsapp for Business accounts; 2) Security of individual staff accounts; and 3) Staff ability to deal with harassment and unwanted messaging on platforms.

The technologists went on to conduct safety and security on social media training sessions which benefitted 120 staff of the participating organisations. Other skill-up sessions conducted included on organisational management suites and website security.

Internet Shutdowns Remain a Continued
Stain In Africa's Digital Rights Landscape

How Telecom Companies in Africa Can Respond Better to Internet Disruptions

We produced *this brief* which casts a spotlight on intermediaries' responses to government internet shutdown orders. The brief highlights the need for intermediaries to improve transparency reporting, always insist on written instructions and orders from authorities, and promptly make these orders public.

Meanwhile, Ethiopia, one of the world's last closed telecommunications markets, opened its long *monopolised telecommunications sector* to a new operator. The move is likely to boost the quality of service provision and promote access to information online. But we warned that the new operator could be bogged down by the government's old habits, including perpetual disruptions to digital communications.

Combating Disinformation in Africa:
Challenges and Prospects

As disinformation grows in form and prevalence in many African countries, the challenges to combating it are equally increasing yet measures to combat it remain inadequate and often inappropriate. This has got disinformation researchers concerned that, if more robust measures are not adopted, disinformation could become pervasive, harder to fight, and with broad social and political ramifications.

Also crucial to combating disinformation is generating evidence of the form and prevalence of disinformation, and how it originates and spreads between different mediums and communities. In this regard, CIPESA in conjunction with partners in five countries (Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda), conducted a *study* to understand the nature, perpetrators, strategies and pathways of disinformation, and its effects on democracy actors including civil society, bloggers, government critics, and activists.

Ethiopia
936 (USD) | 25% | 49%
Authoritarian
Not free

Nigeria
2,097 (USD) | 75% | 104%
Hybrid regime
Partly free

Kenya
1,878 (USD) | 122% | 133%
Hybrid regime
Partly free

Cameroon
1,537 (USD) | 34% | 78%
Authoritarian
Not free

Uganda
822 (USD) | 52% | 69%
Hybrid regime
Not free

GDP per capita | Internet penetration | Phone penetration | Regime type | Freedom Index
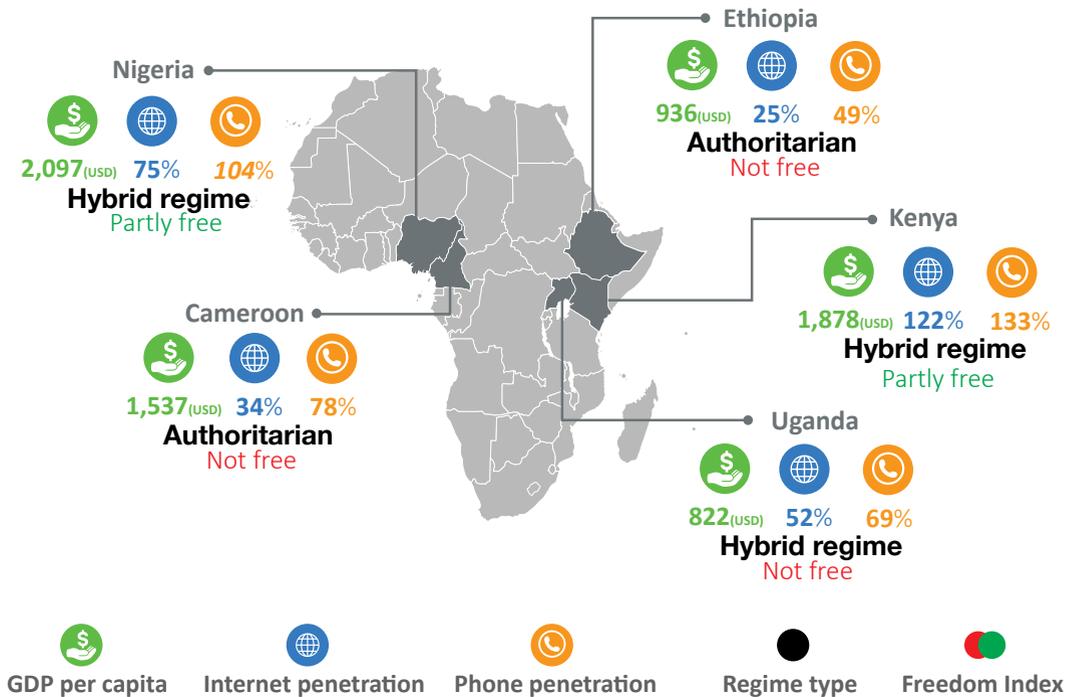
Advancing Digital Inclusion of
Persons With Disabilities in Africa

Persons with disabilities have unique needs and have for long been disadvantaged, yet the more some African countries get digitally connected, the deeper the digital divide for this community seems to grow.

While millions turned to technology and traditional media for information in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, critical messages about the disease which health authorities, telecom companies, and broadcasters disseminated were not reaching persons with visual and hearing impairments.

While a number of laws and policies have been enacted in various African countries to ensure access to services for persons with disabilities, their implementation continues to lag behind. This, coupled with the lack of awareness by persons with disabilities of their rights has made it difficult for them to demand for ICT-friendly and affordable services.

In turn, the digital exclusion of persons with disabilities worsened with the Covid-19 pandemic yet the Covid-19 crisis rendered technology key to working, learning, political participation and the enjoyment of other rights. Notably, few organisations, within and outside the digital rights movement, are pushing for greater ICT accessibility. See our report on *Advancing Digital Inclusion for Persons With Disabilities in Africa* for more insights.

CIPESA is working to raise the availability of information on ICT and disability in Africa by producing relevant evidence-based research; mainstreaming disability rights issues in conversations about technology access and digital rights; growing the capacity of diverse actors to research on and advocate for meaningful connectivity and digital accessibility; and engaging key actors such as telecom companies and regional bodies.

See more of our efforts on advancing digital inclusion for persons with disabilities in our *blogs*, *letters* to regional bodies, and *indepth reports*. See an indepth report *here.*

Tracking Digital Rights and Covid-19 in Africa:
A Digital Timeline

Covid-19 remained a pivotal point of discussion in much of our work, which documented the ways in which Covid-10 responses permeated into the digital experiences of citizens in various countries. The fight against the pandemic dealt a blow to the promotion and preservation of human rights in various countries.

For some, the outbreak of Covid-19 could not have come at a worse time, as the countries were preparing for general elections (October 2020 for Tanzania, January 2021 for Uganda, and a potential referendum in 2021 and the August 2022 elections in Kenya). Even before confirmation of Covid-19 cases in the region, the three East African countries had instituted Covid-19 mitigation measures. Many of these measures continued to be implemented during 2021, and some of them negatively affected peoples' fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression, access to information, privacy and data protection as well as freedom of assembly and association.

Our work tracked the effect of the coronavirus control measures on respect for digital rights. We documented the shrinking civic spaces and deteriorating civic rights amidst autocratic state responses.

In many cases, *the fight against Covid-19 hurt digital rights* in numerous ways as the various measures adopted by countries eroded civil liberties online and offline. We produced *a digital timeline* which showcased our work on Covid-19 and digital rights trends on the continent.

CIPESA Submissions
and Legislative Reviews

Comments on Proposed Amendment to Tanzania's Online Content Regulations 2021: In September we made a *submission* on the proposed amendments to Tanzania's controversial *Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations, 2020* that regulate online content service providers, internet service providers, application services licensees, and online content users. The proposed amendments provide some ray of hope especially in providing some degree of certainty in definition of key terms and reduction of application and licensing fees. However, the proposals are not sufficient to tackle the deep concerns in the 2020 regulations.

Comments on SIM and Device Registration in Lesotho: CIPESA teamed up with the Internet Society Lesotho Chapter to make a *submission* to the Lesotho Communications Authority (LCA) following the release of the *Communications (Subscriber Identity Module and Mobile Device Registration) Regulations, 2021* pursuant to section 55 of the Communications Act, 2012. The submission identifies various gaps in the proposed regulations, and urges the Lesotho government to drop the repressive and regressive provisions. A separate *submission* was also made on Compliance Monitoring and Revenue Assurance Regulations, 2021. The submission highlighted the threat to online privacy as a result of the regulations.

Review of the Ramifications of Zambia's Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act 2021: As of July 2021, Zambia was increasingly repressing the exercise of civic rights, and human rights defenders were worried that state agencies could apply the recently enacted Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act 2021 to further undermine the digital civic space. See our *review.*

Meanwhile, CIPESA associates delved into issues such as *Charting the Link Between Disinformation, Disruptions, Diseases and the Diaspora in Cameroon and DR Congo (French)* as well as understanding the data politics of pandemics and ultimately, *the cost of Covid-19 denialism.*
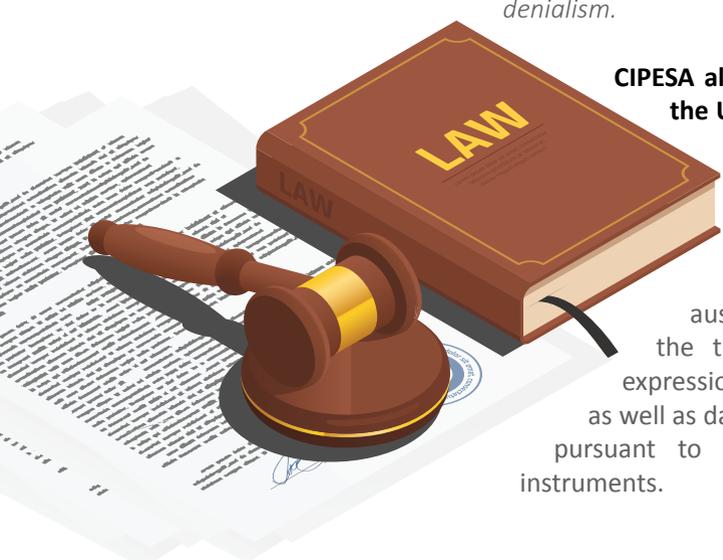
CIPESA alongside Small Media made Stakeholder Submissions to the United Nations Human Rights Council on Digital Rights in South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe: We made joint stakeholder submissions on digital rights in the aforementioned countries as part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism which is an assessment of a country's human rights under the auspices of the Human Rights Council. The submissions urge the three countries to ensure that rights to freedom of expression, freedom of information, equal access and opportunity as well as data protection and privacy are protected offline and online pursuant to constitutional guarantees, regional and international instruments.

In commemoration of the *International Day for Persons With Disabilities (IDWPD),* we hosted a training aimed at journalists from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda on the role of the media in promoting digital rights for persons with disabilities in Africa.

Following the production of an *Analysis of the South Sudan Cybercrimes and Computer Misuse Provisional Order, 2021* we hosted a stakeholder dialogue aimed at strengthening advocacy initiatives in the country.

Promoting Regional Advocacy and Capacity Building
on Fostering Media and Internet Policies in Africa Through Use of the UNESCO Indicators

Despite growing diversity in Africa's media and digital landscape, there remains various undercurrents detrimental to its growth. The plurality, neutrality, safety, and freedom of expression of the media face continued affronts while citizens face gaps in data privacy, internet access affordability, non-existent or weak digital rights framework through to fast changing shifts in content moderation, surveillance capitalism and even online content regulations.

These factors are causing the media in several countries to fall short of various indicators while increasing regressive shifts in internet access and use by citizens and the media alike are also affecting the performance of states on the Internet Universality Indicators (IUIs). However, indepth, structured assessment can better reveal the extent to which states are actually performing and allow for evidence-based policy reform and improvement.

Through hosting of various engagements in 2022, we aim to advocate for media and Internet policy reforms which can enhance the awareness of these indicators as well as promote the utilisation of three key indicators – Media Development Indicators (MDIs), Internet Universality Indicators (IUI) and Journalist Safety Indicators (JSI).

Meetings, Trainings
and Workshops

A series of activities aimed at complementing our research reports and to further awareness on the insights garnered were hosted over the second half of the year. These included engagements with a diversity of stakeholders from across the digital rights arena within Africa and beyond with the profile of participants reflecting focus countries, research areas and the communities we want to deepen specific digital rights issues with.

Our multi-stakeholder trainings and workshops have focused on in-country contexts as well as on regional dynamics. Among these workshops have included engagements on topics such as digital taxation in Africa, digital rights advocacy training for human rights actors, through to institutional trainings for grantees of the ADRF delivered in partnerships with the Center for Private Enterprise (CIPE) and the Africa Centre for Media Excellence (ACME).

Ahead of the June 2021 elections in Ethiopia, we conducted a workshop on disinformation for actors in that country - similar to one on hate speech which we conducted for South Sudan actors, and two others in Kenya and Uganda, all illuminating the delicate role that intermediaries should play in moderating harmful content while promoting legitimate freedom of expression online.

Meanwhile, we attended, hosted or supported a range of meetings in which various insights related to our work were shared including on areas such as digital exclusion, digital taxation, the gender digital divide, freedom of expression, data affordability, data governance and other digital rights themes were discussed. Some of the engagements included the below:

- At **RightsCon 2021**, we participated in a session exploring the Future of the Open Internet hosted by the Web Foundation and Twitter. We contributed insights on what is shaping digital rights in Africa and what needs to change to advance internet freedom. We also supported a session on content moderation in Africa, which delved into issues of disinformation and hate speech and how they are informing state response mechanisms.

- We also coordinated an **Africa Social Hour at RightsCon**, which featured hosts including Nanjala Nyabola of the Africa Digital Rights Network (ADRN), Nwachukwu Egbunike of Global Voices and the Feathers Project and Open Internet for Democracy Leader Nashilongo Gervasius, who shared insights on topics like language online, strategic litigation, and digital rights research. Other topics that also featured at the Social hour included funding opportunities for digital rights work in Africa, technology and disability, as well as the gender dynamics of online spaces.

- Further, at a Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) session, we shared insights on Building the Business Case for Digital Rights. In our capacity as a member of the Africa Internet Rights Alliance (AIRA), we shared additional business and digital rights lessons in a session organised by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the B-Tech (Office of the United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights).
- Alongside Facebook (Public Policy Southern Africa Region) and Center for Human Rights, Pollicy and Internet Society Namibia, we supported a **Roundtable on Gender-Based Violence Online** in the Southern Africa region.
- The NetHope **Africa Anniversary Summit**
- Roundtable Session hosted by the Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA) on **Finding Alternative/Balanced Approach(es) to State Extremism in Data Governance** The Namibian Media Trust (NMT) **Launch event of the African Media Policy Handbook for Educators** developed by UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) alongside Fraycollege.
- Session at the Africa Internet Governance Forum (AfIGF) on *Barriers and opportunities for Internet access in Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic*
- In Uganda, we participated in an ICNL webinar on **Addressing Uganda's Crackdown on NGOs** and also **hosted a dialogue exploring the impact of Uganda's digital space on democratic participation of citizens.**
- A discussion on **Fighting misinformation with development cooperation** hosted by GIZ.

Focus on Telecommunications
Companies in Africa

Documenting How Telecom Companies in Africa Can Respond Better to Internet Disruptions

While the pandemic had an adverse effect on many aspects of society online and offline, we remained steadfast in documenting how, even in times of crisis, basic rights must be upheld including by telecommunications companies.

We produced *a brief* which cast the spotlight on intermediaries' responses to government internet shutdown orders. In it, we highlight the need for intermediaries to improve transparency reporting; always insist on written instructions and orders from authorities, and promptly make these orders public. These echo the greater digital rights community call to *#KeepItOn.*

Advancing the Digital Rights of Persons With Disabilities in Africa

Over the years, our work has highlighted the need to *remove barriers to ICT accessibility* for persons with disabilities in countries like Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. During the pandemic, we stressed the necessity of *greater access to information* for persons with disabilities and also pointed out the need for *telecommunications service providers, governments and donors* to do more to promote ICT accessibility for this often marginalised community.

We shone the spotlight on the *African Union Commission* (AUC), the *African Telecommunications Union* (ATU) and the *East African Communications Organisation* (EACO) as critical regional bodies with mandates to promote inclusive, affordable, accessible and sustainable ICT for persons with disabilities.

In letters addressed to the three organisations on *International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD),* we reminded them of their obligations to protect and advance the rights of persons with disabilities. See more *here*

Meanwhile, in a *pioneering data-driven investigation*, the Mozambican Disabled Person's Organisation Forum (FAMOD) teamed up with UK-based non-profit Data4Change to run automated accessibility testing on 90 of the most important and useful websites in Mozambique. The result was a *publicly-available dataset* of 722,053 instances of accessibility 'violations'. Each violation represents a barrier preventing someone with a visual, hearing, physical or cognitive impairment from fully engaging with the web page. The investigation was carried out in the context of the *Africa Digital Rights Fund (ADRF)*. See more *here.*

Inspired by the exceptional work of grantees to-date, in February we partnered with the *Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)* and issued a *call to support select current or previous ADRF grantees* to deploy a six-month policy advocacy campaign that furthers the conversation on internet freedom. Eight current or previous grantees of the Africa Digital Rights Fund (ADRF) were awarded grants totalling *USD 63,000 to scale their digital rights policy advocacy efforts*. Across six countries – Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal and Somalia – the thematic focus of the advocacy intervention areas includes women's rights online, digital accessibility for persons with disabilities, social media regulation, and digital entrepreneurship. One initiative, with a continent-wide focus, will explore digital authoritarianism.

Spotlight on Mauritius: Responding To Mauritius' Social Media Regulation Proposal

In early May, Mauritius published a consultation paper on proposed amendments to the country's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) law, purportedly aimed at curbing abuse and misuse of social media. It included the proposal for the establishment of a National Digital Ethics Committee (NDEC) to determine what content is problematic in addition to a Technical Enforcement Unit to oversee the technical enforcement of NDEC's measures.

However, the proposal includes numerous problematic clauses that are contrary to Mauritius' commitments to freedom of expression, data protection and privacy. We analysed the proposals and noted that they Centre State-Led Censorship and also made formal *submissions on the proposed amendments to the Mauritian ICT Authority.*

Forum on Internet Freedom in Africa (FIFAfrica21)

The annual Forum on Internet Freedom in Africa for its eighth year running served as the pinnacle platform for a diverse multi-stakeholder engagement on the various shifts and trends shaping internet use, access and perceptions in Africa. While revolving around three primary themes of Access to Information, Digital Inclusion, and Key Trends shaping digital rights in Africa, the Forum served as an avenue to dissect and deliberate on topics shaping the digital rights agenda in the continent and other parts of the world.

Themes of FIFAfrica21

1: Access To Information *in commemoration of the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI) marked every September 28*
The right of access to information especially in the online domain is coming under increased threats, including through digital taxation, network disruptions, and laws criminalising some content. Since inception, FIFAfrica has coincided with the IDUAI so as to increase *awareness* on the right to information, with UNESCO, media organisations, government agencies and civil society entities joining in over the years to host sessions, workshops, and specialised training on the various ways in which access to information and digital rights coincide.

2: Digital Inclusion *as a means to an end for the Web We Want*
The internet is a public good and a basic right. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, this is far from the reality. Promoting an inclusive internet is at the core of what we do at CIPESA and is one of the reasons we are among the founding members of the global Web We Want coalition initiated by the Web Foundation. Digital exclusion is shaped by numerous factors ranging from disability, language, education, finance, gender, country contexts and citizenship. Further, there is a growing concern that minority and marginalised communities such as *refugees* and *persons with disabilities* are being left behind in accessing information on Covid-19. This is because, despite the recent expansion in ICT usage, digital exclusion persists due to limited access and affordability of the requisite ICT tools, low digital literacy skills and shortage of content in accessible formats.

3: Key Trends in 2021 shaping the digital landscape in Africa
The various challenges that were affecting digital rights in Africa have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Veiled by the need to manage and address the global health concerns emerging from the pandemic, *many measures* introduced may have granted authoritarian regimes a blank cheque to impose unnecessary, broad and permanent measures that affect digital rights. However, there are some positives that have been registered with technology gaining centrality in the lives of states, persons and communities. Nonetheless, the pandemic has illuminated the unequal access to technology in African countries and FIFAfrica will delve into the trends that have emerged over the course of the year, and explore ways to address the gaps and concerns.

While taking on a hybrid format for a second year running, online sessions were complemented with in-person physical hubs in *five countries* – Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe, which were run in partnership with Zaina Foundation, Africa Kiburi, Jonction Senegal, International Training Programme (ITP), Zimbabwe Centre for Media and Information Literacy (ZCMIL), Centre for Media Literacy and Community Development (CEMCOD), and Rudi International.

One of the highlights was the use of sign language interpretation through all sessions in alignment with our commitment towards an inclusive digital society and in line with our ongoing work on digital inclusion and representation in Africa. Further highlights included a Data-Driven Advocacy Sketchathon hosted in partnership with Data4Change, which included a series of critical discussions to get participants thinking more about how to use data in digital rights advocacy.

By the Numbers
#FIFAfrica21

Primary Themes 3
- Access to Information
- Digital Inclusion
- Key Trends shaping digital trends in Africa

Pre-event trainings 2

6 **Remote hubs across Five countries**
Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe

25 **Virtual sessions**
lightning talks, report launches, strategy sessions, panels and learning calls
🎧 **115** speakers   **900** Registered attendees

Platforms for access 3

▶ YouTube
➜ **2,599** shared within the platforms

Whova
⬇ **506** downloads of the event platform

📹 zoom

27 Recordings from the Forum accessible in the **FIFAfrica21 playlist**
⌐REC●⌐

Social media (@cipesaug)
1.5M potential amplification impressions and
2.86M multiplier amplification rate

At least
60 countries

State of Internet Freedom in Africa report launched
Effects of State Surveillance on Democratic Participation in Africa
⬇ **1469** downloads in the first month

In 2021, FIFAfrica was supported by the Ford Foundation, Sigrid Rausing Trust, Omidyar Network, Small Media, Internews, the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EU ISS), and the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and served as a platform for deliberation on gaps, concerns and opportunities for advancing privacy, free expression, non-discrimination and the free flow of information online.

State of Internet Freedom in Africa Report:
How State Surveillance is Stifling Democratic Participation in Africa
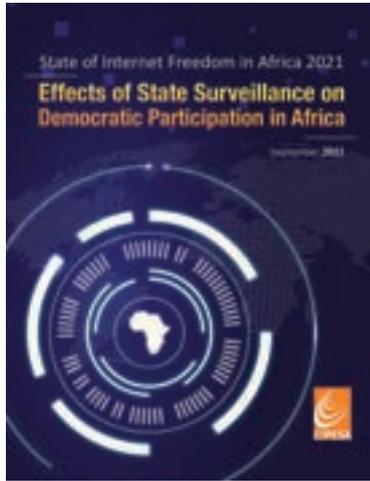
Our *2021 State of Internet Freedom in Africa Report* focused on how surveillance has become a principal threat to digital rights in Africa, a weakening force to civil society and independent voices, and ultimately a driver of authoritarianism. The study mapped the prevalent forms of surveillance, the laws that aid surveillance, and the impact of state surveillance on the ability of individuals and organisations to organise, mobilise, and engage in democratic processes.

One of the "democratising effects" of the internet was that it had provided a safe and alternative engagement platform that could help circumvent and diminish the repressive state's control over the means of communication, thereby enabling greater organising and expression of dissenting opinions. However, autocrats in the region have appropriated the power of digital technologies to stifle dissent and to ramp up their capabilities to snoop on, punish, and silence critical and dissenting forces.

The report was launched at the Forum on Internet Freedom in Africa (FIFAfrica), which was for a second successive year held as a hybrid event.

We are grateful for the support of our sponsors:

Making The Case For Documenting and
Advancing Policy For Digital Inclusion

Advancing Inclusive Digital Economy and Digital Transformation in Africa

Earlier in June, CIPESA alongside the World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA) hosted a roundtable with stakeholders committed to digital inclusion in the region. The engagement aimed to foster coordinated multi-stakeholder actions that encourage digital inclusion and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. This is a continuation of our work aimed at increasing private sector and civil society interactions on the cross paths of digital rights, digital transformation and digital economy.

To identify regional opportunities that can positively shape Africa's digital transformation, in 2019, the *Centre for International Private Enterprise (CIPE)* and CIPESA brought together over 35 stakeholders representing the local private sector, civil society, media organisations, and government for a regional policy dialogue that formed the basis of the *Roadmap to Reform: Building an Enabling Environment for Inclusive Digital Transformation in Africa.*

The Roadmap advocates for the advancement of strong consumer protection legislation across Africa to "help enhance trust in eCommerce across business-to-consumer (B2C) transactions and business-to-business (B2B) transactions that can arise in disputes around digital payments." Since the multi-stakeholder conversations surrounding the adoption of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2019, key recommendations highlighted in the Roadmap to Reform remain timely, as African Union member states begin to implement the agreement after it *came into force on January 1, 2021*. See more about the *Roadmap to Reform.*

Are Cryptocurrencies the Future of Freedom and Financial Inclusion in Africa?

Advances in innovation have ushered in new approaches to digital transformation and financial service provision. With the growth in internet connectivity in Sub-Saharan Africa, emerging technologies such as blockchain and cryptocurrencies have the potential to advance financial inclusion.

According to the *World Bank*, Sub-Saharan Africa has one of the highest remittance rates in the world. In 2019, 3.6% of the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was derived from personal remittances - a figure over three times the global average. However, the region also has *the world's largest unbanked population*, with only 42.6% of those above the age of 15 having an account at a financial institution.

With the bulk of remittances on the continent being *peer-to-peer transfers*, cryptocurrencies have the potential to revolutionise remittances between Africa and the rest of the world. Cryptocurrency-based remittances would result in faster transfers, less logistical constraints, and lower transaction costs due to advanced blockchain technology. Whereas remittances cannot be considered a form of financial inclusion, their potential application to digital currency infrastructures could usher in more inclusive financial infrastructures. See *more* about the future of cryptocurrency in Africa.

Our
Supporters

Our work is supported by a wide, globally-distributed network of organisations. We extend our gratitude to these supporters for their continued commitment to our work, and to the work of our network of collaborators.

In 2021, our work was supported by the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), Sigrid Rausing Trust, Ford Foundation, Small Media, Facebook, The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), Deutsche Welle Akademie, Hewlett Foundation, IFEX, Omidyar Networks, The Danish Institute for Human Rights, EU Direct/ Institute for Security Studies, East West Management Institute, Internews, The Kenya ICT Action Network (KICTANet), The NetGain Partnership, New Venture Fund, Open Society Foundations, Tactical Tech, Open Institute, UNESCO,and University of Edinburgh.

The CIPESA income for 2021 was USD 1,686,954. Our books of accounts are independently audited annually in accordance with the International Financial Reporting Standards.