



Report on: The Context of Digital Rights as Uganda Prepared for Elections

Event Details

- **Date:** 22 January 2025
- **Duration:** 2 hours
- **Format:** XSpace discussion

Host: Canary Mugume

The main speakers included:

- **Aidah Bukubuza**, Digital Transformation and Rights Advocate, AYDIA Gender and Technology Initiative
- **Judith Atim**, Head of Programs, Center for Constitutional Governance (CCG)
- **Hood Lubowa**, Civic Engagement & Digital Rights Lead, Oxfam Uganda
- **Christopher Okidi**, CEO, Kampala Analytica

Introduction

As Uganda prepared for the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in 2026, the role of digital technology in the electoral process had been growing steadily. By this time, Uganda had 18.9 million internet subscribers, equating to approximately 46 internet connections for every 100 Ugandans. However, despite this growth, radio remained the most widely accessible technology, with a penetration rate of 45%, far surpassing television at 17% and computers at 4%.



For the majority of Ugandans, especially in rural areas where 75.5% of the population resided, the internet remained largely inaccessible. Given that Uganda had a history of curtailing the usage of digital technologies during elections—including blocking websites, censoring SMS, shutting down mobile money services, and restricting social media platforms—the reliance on technology in the electoral process posed significant challenges. These practices not only restricted free expression but also hindered the democratic process, making it difficult to guarantee a level playing field for elections that depended heavily on technology.

In response to these concerns, the "Recenter the Civic Internet Through Partner Engagement" project, a collaboration between Oxfam Uganda and the Center for Constitutional Governance (CCG), aimed to address these issues by promoting digital inclusion, women's empowerment, and active participation in digital spaces. CCG organized a discussion on its XSpace platform to explore the state of digital rights in Uganda, focusing on the challenges and opportunities that arose when technology intersected with politics during election periods.

Objectives

The key objectives of this initiative were:

1. To create a platform for stakeholders to discuss the intersection of digital rights and electoral democracy in Uganda.
2. To identify the challenges and opportunities associated with promoting digital rights in Uganda's electoral context.
3. To propose recommendations for protecting and promoting digital rights during the electoral process.

Target Audience



The event catered to a diverse range of stakeholders, including:

- Civil society organizations
- Human rights activists
- Digital rights advocates
- Electoral commission officials
- Government representatives
- Media practitioners
- Academia and research institutions

Key Themes

The discussion centered on several important themes, including:

1. **Digital Rights and Electoral Democracy:** How could digital rights be protected and promoted within Uganda's electoral context? What were the implications of digital rights violations on democratic processes?
2. **Online Freedom and Censorship:** What were the challenges and risks associated with online censorship, internet shutdowns, and social media regulation, especially in the context of elections in Uganda?
3. **Technological Manipulation and Disinformation:** What were the risks associated with technological manipulation, disinformation, and fake news during elections, and how could Uganda mitigate these risks?
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4. **Inclusive and Accessible Digital Technologies:** How could digital technologies be made more inclusive and accessible to all Ugandans, especially marginalized communities, during the electoral process?

Key takeaways and insights



- Invest in digital infrastructure in rural and underserved areas, ensuring that internet access is widespread and affordable. Additionally, develop accessible digital platforms that cater to different abilities and languages, ensuring broad participation.
- Promote digital literacy programs to help citizens critically assess online content and work with tech companies to develop strategies for combating disinformation, including fact-checking initiatives and content moderation
- Advocate for a more open internet policy, including the removal of restrictions on social media and online platforms, to guarantee free expression and access to information during the electoral process.
- Implement clear and transparent policies protecting digital rights during elections, ensuring that digital platforms are accessible and secure for all stakeholders, particularly marginalized groups.

In conclusion, as Uganda prepared for the 2026 elections, digital rights were set to play a pivotal role in shaping the democratic process. The event served as an essential platform to highlight key issues, share knowledge, and develop strategies for ensuring that digital technologies would be used to foster a fair, transparent, and inclusive electoral environment. Through these discussions, stakeholders had the opportunity to engage with actionable recommendations that would help protect digital rights and guarantee a more equitable electoral process.

Prepared by:

Okadapau Simon Peter

Approved by: