



INTERNET SHUTDOWN REPORT IN TANZANIA

2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Zaina Foundation is a non-governmental, non-profit sharing organization that was founded in 2017 and registered under the NGO's Act of 2002 with the aim of promoting digital rights in Tanzania. Zaina Foundation's vision is to empower women in technology through digital security and privacy capacity building, workshops and training. This is done through providing capacity building of digital security training to women and human rights defenders in Tanzania, localization of digital tools and content where we translate open-source tools in the Swahili language in order to allow Swahili users to access secured tools for their communication. Additionally, Zaina Foundation monitors internet shutdowns in Tanzania and through its UX Project the organization tests open-source tools collect feedback from end-users during training and shares them with developers, in the quest to help improve the tools friendlier for users.

Freedom of expression is a cornerstone of democracy and the basis of other rights and freedoms in general. Therefore, limiting freedom of expression is infringing other rights to human rights defenders as well. Some of Africa governments have attempted and some are still on the verge of determining the rules of the rapidly evolving internet ecosystems. A good number will pursue policy, legislation, arrests and governance objectives in a manner that is removed from the perspectives, international laws, rights and needs of individuals and institutions as. Laws developed without input from diverse stakeholders, including voices from civil society, are putting marginalized populations at risk of grave human rights abuses. This brief looks at some experiences that happened in Tanzanian.

Background

Tanzanians experienced restrictions to access the internet last year during the general election of 2020. It is very unfortunate that most citizens have little or no knowledge of the internet shutdown and how to manage this challenge. This has been proved during the shutdown of the internet during the general election. The majority failed to communicate and share or access information because they were unable to access the internet and some sites were blocked for example Twitter, telegram, whatsapp and youtube. Surprisingly, when asked they said they thought it's just an internet infrastructure technical issue. They don't know it's intentionally planned by the government.

Among the indicators for internet shutdown includes amendment and creation of media and cybercrime laws and recently released Online Contents Regulations of 2020 which limits freedom of expression, access to information and civic space in Tanzania. As for Tanzania, limitation to freedom of expression started with amendments of cyber laws, media laws and its regulations, despite the fact that freedom of expression is a constitution and human rights issue in Tanzania. The new Cyber Crime Law in Tanzania is an addition to the list of penal laws regulating freedom of expression. While the supporters of the laws positively dramatize the usefulness of the laws in combating cyber-crime, online unethical conducts and violation of intellectual property online, the critics are challenging the law for being draconian and infringing the freedom of expression.

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¹ <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/government-policy-internet-must-be-rights-based-and-user-centred>

Emanating issues on Internet accessibility: During pre-election, during and after 2020 elections

Freedom of information and the media: The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) imposed a variety of derent against independent media and clamped down on communication channels which mostly used internet platforms as an ecosystem. This includes suspension of bulk short text messaging services, blocking social media sites, and shutting down Internet communication ahead of the elections.

Freedom of expression (Article 19 Of Universal Declaration of Human Rights): Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority imposed an intermittent Internet chokehold on Mainland Tanzania and in Zanzibar. Twitter, WhatsApp and other social media platforms were shut down, and mobile phone service providers limited use of short text messages and voice calls.

Free expression and association: The safety and integrity of the person were flagrantly violated despite guarantees in the Constitution. The constricted civic space, compounded by the restricted access to the Internet and social media applications, denied many people access to platforms and spaces for free expression and assembly. Civil society organisations had been barred from engaging meaningfully in the electoral process.

Censorship: *a) Media:* Sanctions against the internet usage imposed by the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority instituted a censorship regime that prevented the provision of balanced and accurate reportage of the 2020 elections.

b) Citizens: The restrictions on mainstream media forced citizens to use social media as a source of information and platform for self-expression. Further the slowdown of the Internet denied Tanzanians to efficiently use various social media platforms as a space for expression and assembly. Later, the TCRA imposed a complete internet shutdown on the eve of the elections, as well as on Election Day, which gravely hampered communication and access to information.

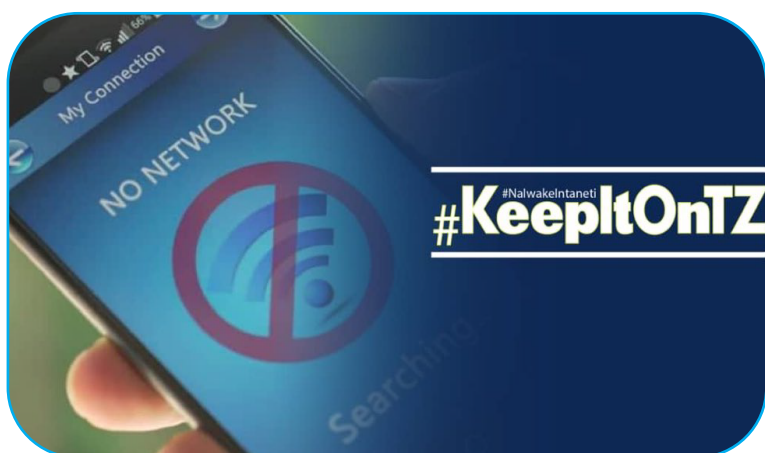
Transparency and Accountability: Election Day activities was greatly undermined by an Internet shutdown as well as slowdown and denial of service from mobile telephone networks.



#KEEPLITONTZ REPORT SUMMARY

Tanzanians has the rights to access information and communicate during election period and telcos have responsibility to keep them online all the time. Tanzania joined other countries around the world in shutdowns internet during election period. Zaina Foundation run the campaign to push back internet and raise awareness to community in Tanzania about Internet Shutdowns specific on how to measure, documents and circumvent censorship in Tanzania. The Digital Rights Coalition of ten people worked together in advocacy throughout 2020 and share caption which equipped Tanzania community with skills and support in case of any censorship. The unique of this campaign in Tanzania it prepares community and act before the incidence. Censorship begins on October 27th on election eve, blocking of sites like tweeter, Tor browser and you tube were among targeted site in Tanzania.

#KeepItOnTZ advocacy campaign reached more than 30 millions of internet users in Tanzania through out 2020. Below were some photos of campaign.



The censorship of network in Tanzania were documented by Open Observatory Network Interference and no evidence on who ordered shutdowns between government the office of telecommunication and Tanzania Communication Regulations Authorities (TCRA) both entities avoided to give clear explanation on shutdown. After election results tweeter where still blocked in Tanzania due to its popularity and attention in spread message especially election related messages.

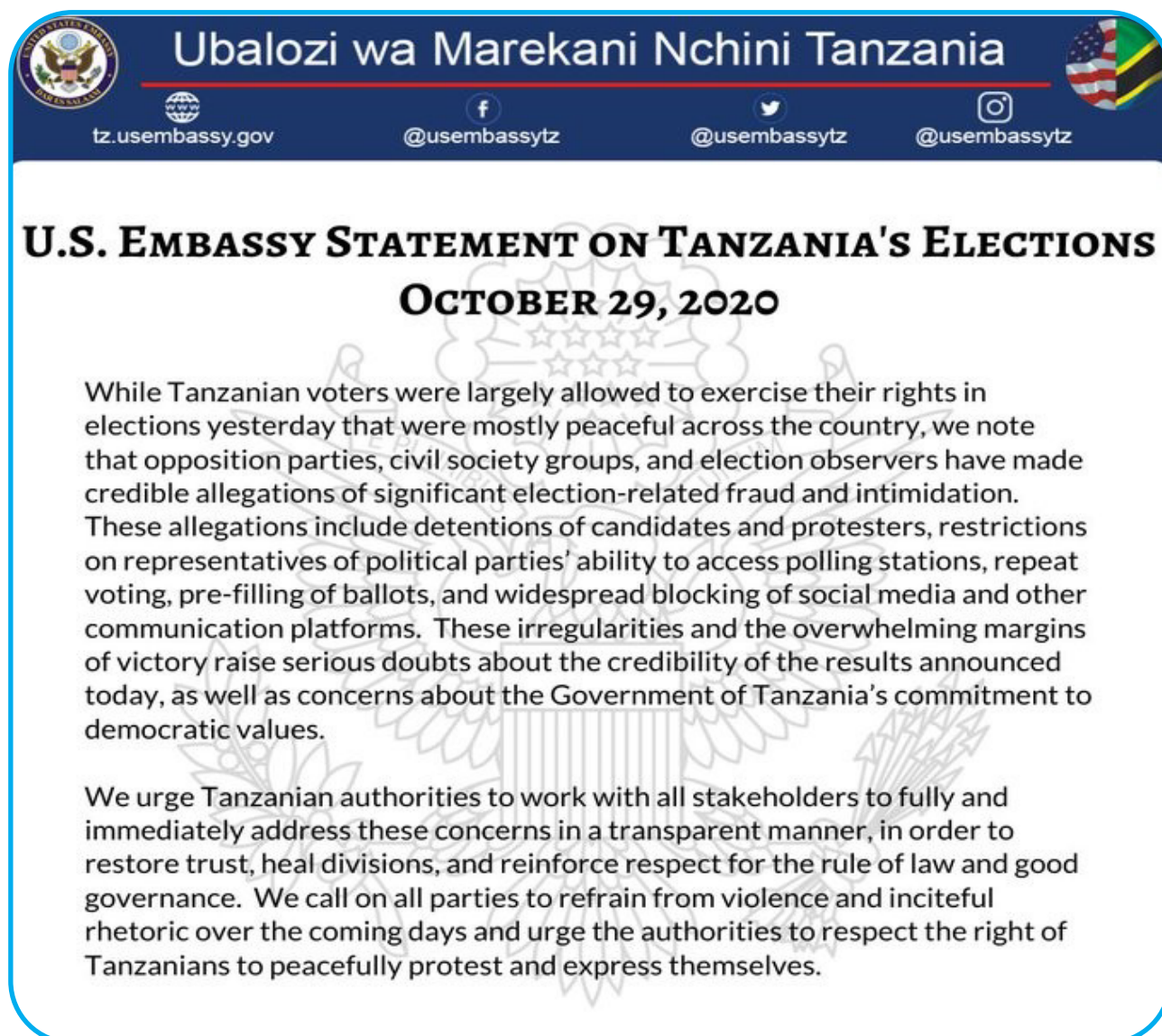
In July 2020 TCRA introduced new Electronic and Post Communication (Online Contents) Regulation which highlighted and infringe Freedom of Expression in Tanzania. Enjoyment of freedom of expression and access to information online were limited in Tanzania throughout 2020.

#KeepItOnTZ advocacy campaign prepared community to respond during censorship in Tanzania. Below are caption from #KeepItOnTZ advocacy campaign on tweeter:



Statements from the international community on clampdown on internet usage

1. **United States of America:** “... we remain deeply concerned by credible reports of significant and widespread voting irregularities, **internet interruption**, arrests, and violence by security forces both in mainland Tanzania and in Zanzibar.” The US Ambassador to Tanzania, Donald J. Wright



2. Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA)

*“...Access to election information by voters, political parties and other stakeholders: Limited televised access to parliamentary proceedings, restrictions **on freedoms of the media and internet restrictions** during the voting process are all examples of ways in which information was limited during the 2020 electoral period”*

3 United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner

"Free flow of information is critical to any democratic society, and especially so in an electoral context," the High Commissioner said, adding that any restrictions on information and communication technology must be in line with international human rights laws and standards."

<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/government-policy-internet-must-be-rights-based-and-user-centred>

<https://twitter.com/usembassytz/status/1321839816124846092>

[Microsoft Word - EISA Preliminary Statement - Tanzania 2020 General elections - FINAL Abridged Statement](#)

<https://ooni.org/post/2020-tanzania-blocks-social-media-tor-election-day/>

<https://www.accessnow.org/tanzania-internet-shutdowns-victim-stories/>

<https://www.accessnow.org/tanzania-votes-government-forces-telcos-escalate-censorship/>

4. Amnesty International

*“Amnesty International urges the Tanzanian authorities to end arbitrary arrests of opposition politicians, **allow media outlets** and NGOs to operate freely, and permit independent observers to monitor and speak out about human rights issues. It is also crucial that the government ensures accountability for election-related human rights violations and guarantees post-election human rights reforms to reverse the government’s increasing repression and crackdown on the civic space.”*

Recommendation

Legislation: The Legislature should urgently repeal and review all repressive laws and regulations and bring any such laws and regulations in conformity with Tanzania’s constitution and international human rights obligations and commitments.

The Executive: The office of the president should publicly commit that the government will domesticate the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, and end intimidation on internet usage.

The Office of Inspector General: Publicly committed to ensure that the authorities will observe and respect international human rights standards related to policing and avoid forceful confiscation/ altering civilians' internet ecosystem for exercising their fundamental rights of accessing, imparting and storing information.

International community: The international community should be aware that peace is a consequence of the rule of law, justice and protection of human rights. Therefore, they should commit to supporting all action towards conformity with international standards.

Citizens and civil society: CSO’s should work together with and keep the government in check by advocating for internet rights. This is by reviving the stalled constitution review process that will encompass the new technological advancement and respect the inclusion of women and youth.

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26489&LangID=E>

SPECIAL THANKS

We thank Access Now for their support in this project of Monitoring and Documenting Internet Shutdown in Tanzania through 2020. Zaina Foundation team expects to have longer partnership with Access Now in promoting Digital Rights in Tanzania.