REPORT ON INTERNET SHUTDOWNS IN TANZANIA

30th August, 2024

Internet Shutdown is an intentional disruption of internet or electronic communications, rendering them inaccessible or effectively unusable, for a specific population or within a location, often to exert control over the flow of information - Access Now[1]. Authorities in Tanzania restricted X/Twitter on August 30, 2024 for major mobile broadband users (Airtel, Vodacom and Tigo). Up to June 2024, the total internet users in Tanzania are 39.3 million. 21 million Internet users are connected via mobile broadband out of 39.3 million internet users[2]. Due to the ongoing political conflict in the country between Security Forces and the main opposition political party-Democratic and Development Party (CDM) also known as CHADEMA, the Tanzania Police claimed to have intelligence information on CDM plans to mobilize youths protest to attack all police stations in Dar es salaam due to abductions of CDM youth leader known as Deusdedit Soka, who disappeared since 18th August 2024, along with 2 youth representatives from CDM. On 30th August, 2024 at 11:35 Tanzania Time, Police Forces released a public statement emphasizing the CDM to stop organizing protests and attacks on police stations in Dar es salaam[3]. X/Twitter social media was blocked from 11:50 AM on 30th August, 2024 and restored on 31st August,2024 early in the morning. Telegram was blocked from 31stAugust, 2024 until this report was released; still this platform is inaccessible without circumvention software[4].

Access to information in Tanzania is a constitutional right from Article 18 of the Constitution of United Republic of Tanzania, 1977[5]. The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania must take responsibility to ensure open access to the internet, affordable and safe use of internet and security for all internet users in Tanzania at all time.

Web Connectivity Test, twitter.com

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[1] www.accessnow.org

[2] https://www.tcra.go.tz/uploads/text-ditor/files/Communication%20Statistics%20report%20for%20end%20of%20June%202024_KSW_1721315071.pdf

[3] https://x.com/tanpol/status/1829436930053833118/photo/1

[4] https://x.com/ZainaFoundation/status/1829741285797691679

[5] https://www.nao.go.tz/uploads/Constitution_of_the_United_Republic_of_Tanzania_en.pdf

Zaina Foundation along with Digital Rights Coalition members calls for the authorities in Tanzania to restore Telegram to allow citizens to enjoy freedom of expression and access to information. As Tanzania is approaching the local elections on 27th November 2024, X/twitter, Telegram, Instagram, Youtube, Clubhouse, Facebook are key social media platforms for civic participation and engagement through open dialogue and debate. All platforms have become a very powerful and effective tools in effecting democratic transformation and questioning the Government accountability on various human rights and good governance aspects as compared to other media forms which are limited due to Government over-regulation.

The Impacts of Social Media Backout in Tanzania 2024

Internet Shutdowns have many impacts socially, politically and economically. The major impact of shutdowns in Tanzania is the abrupt infringement of the freedom of expression and access to information contrary to Article 18 of the Tanzania Constitution. This impact cost the majority of human rights defenders in Tanzania including journalists, activists, lawyers, at risk communities, NGO workers and even public workers. Moreover, social media blackouts cut connections between relatives, friends and international communities as nowadays most communication is done online.

Zaina Foundation Advocacy work on Internet Shutdowns in Tanzania

In its efforts to respond to internet shutdowns, Zaina Foundation is implementing a project on Internet Shutdown (Predict, Prepare, Prevent, Respond to Internet shutdowns ahead of elections in Tanzania 2024/2025). This project involves 20 fellows from 8 regions across Tanzania and the initiatives such as awareness activities; understanding scenarios of Internet Shutdowns; performing network measurement for evidence collection to use during advocacy and litigation, and conducting online internet freedom campaigns. These initiatives aim to promote and expand democracy in Tanzania through access to information online and offline for decision making, enhanced freedom of expression as well as protecting the digital rights environment in our interconnected world.

To promote well-informed communities, we organize internet freedom workshops and webinars to educate digital rights defenders about the scenarios and impact of internet shutdown and the importance of digital rights. These sessions aims to empower communities with the knowledge and skills to advocate for internet freedom and digital rights.

Zaina Foundation empowers digital rights defenders on the technical aspects of internet shutdown including conducting network measurement to generate evidence, assess the scope and impact of internet shutdowns. Through tools such as Open Observatory for Network Interference

(OONI)[6]Netblock[7]Cloudflare[8] and Internet Outage Detection and Analysis (IODA)[9], we gather real-time data that helps us to understand the extent of internet shutdown and propose effective response mechanisms. This data is also used to inform our advocacy efforts at both national and international levels.

The online internet freedom campaigns leverage social media content to conduct targeted online campaigns that aim to raise awareness about internet freedom progress and issues. Through this digital advocacy, we engage a wider audience and advocate for the Government and organizations to uphold digital rights. We also amplify the voices of affected communities so as to drive meaningful change towards safeguarding internet freedom.

Through these comprehensive efforts, Zaina Foundation aims to promote a more inclusive and open internet for all because internet access is a fundamental human right that should be protected in the digital age.

Conclusion

Zaina Foundation continues to advocate for Internet shutdowns not to happen in Tanzania ahead of 2024 and 2025 elections and raising awareness to the community to be prepared in case the incidents happen to make sure they do not leave anyone offline all the time. Advocacy for policy reform especially Electronic and Online Contents Regulations, 2022[10] to allow citizens in Tanzania to use Virtual Private Network (VPN) to access blocked contents and have privacy online. Lastly, to strengthen its Digital Rights Coalition in order to have collective advocacy work and expand its work in both Tanzania mainland and Zanzibar.

PREDICT, PREPARE, PREVENT AND RESPOND.

Fore More information... info@zainafoundationtz.org
www.zainafoundationtz.org

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[6] www.ooni.org

[7] https://netblocks.org/

[8] https://radar.cloudflare.com/

[9] https://preparepreventresist.org/2023/02/28/ioda-internet-outage-detection-and-analysis/

[10] https://zainafoundationtz.org/analysis-of-electronic-and-post-online-contents-regulation-2022/