



ZAINA FOUNDATION



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1. Introduction

As Tanzania approaches the upcoming 2025 General Elections, it is crucial to reflect on digital rights and inclusion aspects and their role in promoting the democratic principles. Zaina Foundation has been actively working to promote digital rights and inclusion in Tanzania including advocating for internet freedom and empowering human rights defenders, with the skills and tools they need to navigate and secure their digital spaces. This bulletin highlights the current state of digital rights and inclusion in Tanzania, outlines the activities undertaken to promote these rights in Tanzania, and presents a valuable publication on secure communication for human rights defenders.

2. State of Digital Rights and Inclusion in Tanzania

Recently, Tanzania recorded a rapid increase in internet subscribers reaching 48 Million as of December 2024 compared to 41.4 Million recorded in September 2023. The same is for smartphone penetration growing to 23.4 Million as of December 2024. There is also notable progress in advancing digital rights and inclusion agenda such as the enactment of laws and policies along with policy reforms, improvement of the internet infrastructure and many other meaningful efforts. However, the digital rights and inclusion landscape is currently marked by various challenges in relation to internet freedom and the potential impact of these issues on the upcoming national elections. The internet service remains expensive, hindering affordability and accessibility.

The challenges associated with internet service providers' infrastructure have rendered the internet inaccessible at most needed times. These challenges have negatively impacted freedom of expression and access to information in online spaces as most communication these days is done online.

Also, a shrinking civic space, fueled by political tension, limits freedom of expression and association in online spaces, undermining democratic principles.

As we prepare for the national elections this repression may silence citizens, preventing them from questioning the credibility and accountability of the candidates running for office.

Zaina Foundation calls for the authorities in Tanzania to ensure the internet is accessible and affordable as well as safe and secure for all internet users in Tanzania all the time. The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania must take responsibility for expanding civic space by ensuring citizens' rights to freedom of expression and association, as well as their access to information in online spaces in conformity to the Article 18 of the United Republic of Tanzania Constitution 1977 and International Instruments.



3. Activities

January, 2025, Zaina Foundation hosted a Digital Security Training for Tanzania Digital Rights Coalition members in Dar es Salaam region. The training engaged 20 members working in civil society organizations including human rights defenders, journalists, activists, lawyers and content creators from Tanzania Mainland and Zanzibar. This training empowered human rights defenders with the knowledge and skills to protect themselves in online spaces and their work as they are highly targeted and vulnerable, particularly, as we prepare for the national elections, which will be held in October 2025.

Zaina Foundation has been engaging in social media/online campaign to advocate for internet freedom using and secure online communication for human rights defenders using hashtags #DigitalRightstz and #KeepitOn. The campaign has reached over 10,000 people across platforms such as X, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn, and has also engaged over 2,000 individuals through blogs and websites.



In January 2025, Zaina Foundation hosted a virtual close-out meeting for the Internet Shutdown Fellowship program of 2024. This meeting engaged 20 fellows from 8 regions in Tanzania to discuss the outcomes of the program and provide constructive feedback about the program as well as upcoming opportunities for fellows. As a result of this program, awareness about internet shutdowns among the citizens and the government has increased as well as the interest of various stakeholders in implementing internet shutdown initiatives in Tanzania.

4. Publications

» Zaina Foundation spearheaded the development of 2025 annual strategic advocacy plan for Tanzania Digital Rights Coalition (DRC) which is set to streamline DRC's members' collective advocacy efforts on the promotion and protection of the freedom of expression and digital rights in Tanzania. Strategically, the DRC members plan to contribute to an improved legal framework on digital rights landscape through capacity building and training, public awareness campaigns, policy advocacy and engagement, research and documentation, community outreach and youth engagement, and performing monitoring and evaluation. Click this link to read full Strategic Advocacy Plan for Tanzania Digital Rights Coalition(2025): <https://zainafoundationtz.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Final-Strategic-Advocacy-Plan-for-Digital-Rights-Coalition.pdf>

» Zaina Foundation has developed a secure communication guide to provide essential guidelines for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) to safeguard their digital presence, particularly during election periods when they are most targeted and vulnerable. addresses various scenarios HRDs might face, such as losing a device or access to an account, receiving suspicious messages, encountering malware, website downtime, online impersonation, harassment, data loss, defamation campaigns, doxxing, surveillance, and the arrest of associates. The provides immediate actions and preventive measures to help HRDs evaluate their situation and respond effectively. This guide is accessible via: <https://zainafoundationtz.org/secure-communion-guide-for-huma-rights-defenders/>

5. Conclusion

As Tanzania moves forward towards advancing digital rights and inclusion, it is critical for the government to take responsibility for ensuring that the internet remains accessible, affordable, and secure for all. Protecting citizens' rights to freedom of expression and association, as well as their access to reliable information, must be a priority, especially in the context of the upcoming elections. Through our ongoing social media and online campaigns, training programs, and publications, Zaina Foundation remains committed to empowering human rights defenders and organizations to enjoy their digital rights and work towards a more inclusive and democratic Tanzania.