

Elevating Tanzanian Voices at IGF 2025: My Journey as a Digital Rights Advocate

By Zaituni Njovu, Executive Director, Zaina Foundation

In June 2025, I had the incredible opportunity to participate in the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) 2025 in Lillestrøm, Norway a vital global gathering that brings together diverse voices to shape the future of internet governance. My participation was generously supported by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) through its Member Travel Support Fund. I was proud to represent the Zaina Foundation, a Tanzanian organization committed to advancing digital rights, inclusion, and gender justice, particularly for women and marginalized communities.

The IGF provided a powerful platform to exchange ideas, amplify local experiences, and engage with global leaders in policy, technology, and civil society. As a digital rights advocate from East Africa, I came to the IGF with clear intentions: to raise the visibility of gendered digital harms in Tanzania, to share our strategies for localizing technology, and to build alliances for a more inclusive internet.

Championing Women's Digital Rights

One of the most impactful sessions I joined addressed gender disinformation and its growing impact on electoral integrity. Drawing from our work at Zaina Foundation, I shared examples of how false, targeted narratives are used to discredit women leaders in Tanzania, particularly as we head into the 2025 General Elections. These attacks ranging from fake scandals to deepfake images undermine women's participation in public life and weaken democratic processes.

The session became a rich space of learning and solidarity as activists from Latin America, South Asia, and West Africa echoed similar experiences. We discussed policy gaps, tech platform accountability, and grassroots strategies that could be adapted across regions.

Bridging the Digital Divide from Arusha to the World

Another key theme throughout the IGF was digital inclusion in the Global South. I spoke about our work in rural Arusha, where women continue to face challenges in accessing digital resources. At Zaina Foundation, we localize digital safety tools and platforms into Swahili, making them accessible to millions of Tanzanian users. I emphasized that if digital transformation is to be truly inclusive, it must be community-driven and linguistically accessible.

Sessions on AI governance, Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence, and internet shutdowns deepened my understanding of the global digital rights landscape. These conversations highlighted just how interconnected our struggles are and how urgent collective action is.

Strengthening Networks, Amplifying Tanzania's Voice

As an APC member, I also joined internal reflection sessions to align our local work with the APC Strategic Plan 2024–2027. We explored how feminist internet principles can be localized and how grassroots voices like ours can shape global policies.

Throughout the forum, I had enriching conversations with allies from Access Now, Global Partners Digital, Internet Society, and other digital rights networks. These dialogues opened doors to new collaborations and affirmed the power of cross-regional solidarity.

I proudly shared Zaina Foundation's initiatives, from digital security training for women human rights defenders to our monitoring of internet shutdowns and online abuse, and our advocacy for inclusive technology policies in Tanzania.

Takeaways and What Comes Next

The IGF experience reminded me of the urgency to continue localizing digital rights work while engaging in global platforms. It is clear that gender-sensitive internet governance, platform accountability, and community engagement must be central to our advocacy moving forward.

Upon returning home, I am committed to:

- Preparing a community brief to share IGF insights with our Digital Rights Coalition members in Tanzania,
- Facilitating knowledge-sharing sessions across our network,
- Exploring joint advocacy campaigns and project opportunities with APC members and feminist tech allies.

Gratitude and Vision

I'm deeply grateful to APC for making my participation in IGF 2025 possible. This journey was more than a professional milestone it was a powerful reminder that local voices matter in shaping the global digital future. I return inspired, energized, and ready to push forward the mission of Zaina Foundation: to create an inclusive, safe, and just digital space for every woman and marginalized community in Tanzania.

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