

Topic Digital Rights & Grassroots Democracy

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Key Takeaways Background

As digital technologies increasingly shape civic participation across Sub-Saharan Africa, young people are using online platforms to organise, mobilise, monitor public institutions, and engage in democratic processes. Civic technology initiatives such as BudgIT, Ushahidi, and Mine Alert demonstrate how digital tools can strengthen transparency and accountability while making governance information more accessible.

However, the webinar highlighted that digital democracy is not only about access to technology. It also depends on the protection of digital rights, particularly the rights to access information, freedom of expression, privacy, and data protection. Without these safeguards, digital spaces can become sites of surveillance, harassment, misinformation, and exclusion.

Digital Rights as Democratic Foundations

Access to information and freedom of expression are prerequisites for meaningful civic participation.

Privacy and data protection enable activists and citizens to organise safely without fear of surveillance or retaliation.

Countries with stronger digital rights protections tend to demonstrate higher levels of citizen participation and democratic resilience.

Digital spaces have become key arenas where democratic participation is both practiced and contested.

Youth-Led Civic Technology

- Young people are increasingly developing and using digital tools to improve government accountability and public oversight.
- Examples such as BudgIT and Ushahidi show how technology can simplify access to budget information, monitor public spending, and crowdsource civic reporting.

- Digital platforms are also being used to discuss public affairs, share verified information, and mobilise communities around common concerns.

Misinformation and Information Integrity

- Participants identified misinformation and difficulties in verifying information as the biggest challenge to digital civic engagement.
- Fact-checking, media literacy, and verification mechanisms are becoming essential democratic tools.
- Several breakout groups proposed campaigns and platforms dedicated to countering misinformation, promoting trusted information sources, and strengthening digital literacy.

Real-World Findings

- 87% of participants reported having used digital tools for civic engagement.
- The most frequently identified obstacle to participation was misinformation and difficulties verifying information.
- Breakout groups developed practical solutions including anonymous corruption-reporting platforms, youth-led fact-checking initiatives, simplified government information campaigns, and multi-platform awareness campaigns.
- Emerging trends include youth-led civic tech initiatives, hybrid online-offline engagement strategies, stronger fact-checking cultures, and growing demand for community-owned digital democracy initiatives.