TORs For Sub Theme 5: Digital Rights and Freedom of expression online

Original is in French

Context and relevance of the sub-theme

The spectacular development of web 2.0 has spawned a new type of Internet user who is both consumer and producer of information. If today, most newspapers have their platform online, citizens in general, through social networks and/or social media, have several opportunities and framework of expression never equaled. If, at first glance, this situation is likely to improve the citizens’ right of access to information and freedom of expression, there is also increasingly the problem of the production of fake news accentuated by the rising power of cyber activism. It is not uncommon for some citizens to promote hate, violence, racism, and so on.

This raises the question of the scope of digital rights and the limits of freedom of expression.

The first edition of the 2016 "Paradigm initiative" report on digital rights in Africa, entitled "Choking the Hose: How governments are harming Internet freedom on a continent that needs greater access," declared the year 2016 "year of Internet shutdowns in Africa". At the time of its publication in December 2016, the year had been marked by eleven network interruptions and/or Internet shutdowns (applications) across the continent, for reasons as varied as the prevention of nuisance, the protests of citizens, the unofficial dissemination of election results and the spreading of online hate speech.

The same report states that in 2017, the digital rights landscape in Africa had three main themes dominating discussions across the continent: continued Internet shutdowns, attacks on freedom of the press and the fight against digital rights violations. The wave of Internet shutdowns, which increased significantly in 2016, continued in 2017. The year was also marked by widespread attacks on press freedom across the continent and digital rights violations by governments.

All these questions are relevant to the specific context of ECOWAS and a forum for dialogue like the West African Internet Governance Forum should be able to discuss these issues related to the existence of the Internet.

These questions are all the more relevant as the overall theme of the 11th regional Forum on Internet Governance focuses on "Shared Responsibilities of Stakeholders for a Robust Internet Governance Ecosystem."

Key issues to be addressed in this panel

1. Freedom of expression online: analysis in comparative law? What are the challenges for regulation? What defense strategies for citizens? (To document some success stories of citizen initiatives on advocacy / lobbying etc.)
2. Fake news: current issues - Roles and responsibilities of the actors? Which solutions and perspectives?
3. Internet shutdowns: Current situation and which advocacy strategies? Which policies to put in place to prevent Internet shutdown? What legislative efforts are being carried out by West African governments in this regard? What are the initiatives underway (eg Paradigm Initiative's Digital Rights Bill in Nigeria: where are we now and what is the current situation?)
4. The results should include the responsibilities of state and non-state actors respectively.
What is the relationship between digital rights and SDGs, how digital rights can hinder or contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in the ECOWAS region.

**Expected results**

- An inventory of digital rights and online freedom of expression in the ECOWAS region is produced
- Citizen advocacy strategies for digital rights and online freedom of expression are proposed
- Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in a context of proliferation of "fake news" are identified and proposals are formulated
- The issue of Internet shutdown is presented and the responsibilities of stakeholders are discussed as well as advocacy strategies against these cuts
- Legislative efforts being deployed and policies to be put in place to ensure the continuity of Internet service are discussed and documented
- The relationship between digital rights and SDGs in the ECOWAS region is discussed

**Methodology**

The sub-theme will be an interactive panel with an introductory note by the moderator followed by panel presentations, and questions-answers.

Proposed panelists:

Moderator / Coordinator, Inoussa TRAORE: introductory presentation on the definition of the concepts of digital rights and freedom of expression online; and brief state of play (max 5 mins)

- Panelist 1, Ms. Anna Anet Sambou, The Gambia: Freedom of expression online: analysis in comparative law? What are the challenges for regulation? What defense strategies for citizens? (To document some success stories of citizen initiatives in the field of advocacy / lobbying etc.) (max 10 mn)
- Panelist 2, Mr. Peterking Quaye, Liberia: : Fake news: current issues? Roles and responsibilities of the actors? Which solutions and perspectives? (max 10 minutes)
  Which policies to put in place? What are the ongoing legislative efforts? What are the interesting initiatives underway? Finally, which responsibilities for state actors? Which responsibilities for non-state actors?

**Sub-theme Coordinator**

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