

IGF 2017 Reporting Template

- Session Title: Internet Shutdowns taking a toll on Africa's internet economy

- Date: 21 December 2017

- Time: 10:10 – 11:40

- Session Organizer: Internet Society Gauteng Chapter

- Chair/Moderator: Yolanda Mlonzi

- Rapporteur/Note taker: Sthembiso Xhakaza

- List of Speakers and their institutional affiliations:

Speaker: Joash Moitui - FAO/IFAD

Speaker: Samuel Ndicho Bambbo – MAG Member

Speaker: Aicha Jeridi Civil Society - Hivos-IGMena

Speaker: Fiona Asonga - Kenya Internet Exchange point

Speaker: Niel Harper – Internet Society Senior Manager Next Generation Leader

Speaker: Mohamed Farahat – Human Rights Lawyer

Speaker: Dr Wairagala Wakabi - CIPESA

- Key Issues raised (1 sentence per issue):

1. In 2016 11 counties lost 2,37million us dollars due to internet shutdown according to research.
2. Economic and other after effects of internet shutdowns have a ripple effect even once the internet has been turned on.
3. CIPESA shared its latest report on the cost of internet shutdowns in Africa, highlighting that there is a direct correlation between internet shutdowns and economic activity.
4. In most cases governments shutdown/disrupt the internet when citizens exercise freedom of expression to question government.
5. Cameroon was used as a case study, where it was shared that governments do not realize that when the internet is shutdown it does not only silence voices but has detrimental effects to social lives, education, health and economic activity
6. Internet Shutdowns/disruptions go against international human rights law standards
7. According to Egyptian Policy Law, the Egyptian government has the power to tell service providers to shutdown the internet and failure to do so may mean losing their operating license.
8. National Security is used as a guise to shutdown the internet in Egypt and other MENA regions, with over 200 websites blocked in Egypt.
9. Internet shutdowns affect the possibilities for governments in Africa to reach their SDGs targets
10. AfriNIC Policy suggestion by community members was used as antagonist to raise awareness on the seriousness of internet shutdowns and why governments need to be held accountable
11. The public must know who is responsible for the internet in their home countries in order to hold governments and service providers accountable
12. Governments hostility towards the internet is due to a lack of knowledge from government officials on the power of the internet and how it can be a tool for development
13. On a technical level, internet shutdowns affect internet infrastructure and thereby making the internet in countries where internet shutdowns/disruptions are common, unstable and unreliable.

14. Internet Society is involved in initiatives like the Internet Engineering Task Force that seek to educate the public on internet infrastructure and emerging issues that affect them.
15. Suggestions on how to tackle the persistent of internet shutdowns:
 - a. Civil society must continue to raise awareness and advocacy around internet shutdowns and campaigns that seek to keep the internet on
 - b. There is a need for a multistakeholder and multisectoral push to educate one another on the impacts of internet shutdowns
 - c. If there are exceptional cases where internet shutdowns/disruptions are needed, guiding principles/frameworks must be developed to ensure transparency and accountability.
 - d. The voice of tech startups in the internet shutdown discourse is missing and they should start engaging in this issue to protect their businesses

- Please describe the Discussions that took place during the workshop session (3 paragraphs):

The moderator opened up the discussion by sharing that inclusive digital transformation in Africa is top of the agenda as this was discussed at length during the recent Africa IGF. Prior to workshop, the organisers shared a questionnaire with the public to gather their views on internet shutdowns and the effects it had on Africa's internet economy. All of the respondents from the questionnaire felt that internet shutdowns is an extremely important issue because of its human rights and economic effects. Furthermore, many felt that Africa is already lagging behind in terms of development and growth and therefore should not miss the digital revolution in its attempts of developing and meeting SDGs.

During the workshop, Cameroon was used a case study since it suffered the longest recorded shutdown. Bambo Samuel who is a MAG member shared that internet shutdowns are a serious concern in his country. He shared that shutdowns were due to political reasons and had far reaching effects to educational opportunities, financial loss and social communities. This started a movement in Cameroon called #BringBackOurInternet. He shared that government have a lack of knowledge on internet issues and they are not engaging their communities. He said that we need to invite our government to all internet governance meetings so that they can learn about the work we do and why the work we do is important. Dr. Wakabi from CIPESA shared his organisations report which calculates the cost of internet shutdowns in Africa, where he further emphasized that Internet shutdowns are indeed effecting the digital economy in Africa. In 2016 alone, roughly 11 countries in Africa that had internet shutdown and lost 2,27million dollars. The effects of shutdowns go beyond the shutdown itself leaving people with weeks and months to fully recover from an internet disruption. Joash Moutiu shared that the Nairobi economy went to decline after the internet shut down was implemented within 2 hours. He cautioned that if we don't act now to save our internet, the economy will suffer. He made mentioned to the basic services that the internet provides through mobile money and how that has a detrimental effect on communities who depend on the internet for survival if disruptions to the internet continue to occur.

Mr. Mohammed Faharat shared the North Africa experience of internet shutdowns saying the internet service providers in Egypt are coerced to shutting down the internet by governments. Unlike other parts of the Africa,

shutdowns occurred during political unrest. Mr. Faharat mentioned that overall internet shutdowns are not provided by law and go against international standards and have major impacts on human rights. He suggested that governments should use human rights as their guide when commissioning internet shutdowns or disruptions. Ms. Aicha Jeridi from ACISIS further echoed these thoughts in her remarks, where she suggested that the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms should be adopted by all governments in Africa as this declaration will be useful in guiding governments. Ms. Fiona Asonga from Kenya felt that more attention and awareness raising is crucial on the issue of internet shutdowns. She said that citizens should hold their governments accountable and they can only do this if they are knowledgeable about the departments and bodies that manage the internet in their home countries. Niel Harper from Internet Society said that ISOC is open to building capacity and sharing knowledge on the issue of internet shutdowns. He shared the various programs that young people and stakeholders can be involved in to better engage on this issues domestically. He also mentioned that internet shutdowns also pose a direct threat to the infrastructure of the internet.

- Please describe any Participant suggestions regarding the way forward/ potential next steps /key takeaways (3 paragraphs):

The participants agreed that this is important topic but governments are not willing to come to the table and address this topic openly. A participant from the floor who is a regulator and works closely with government shared that while these issues are a concern, there is apprehension and fear to openly engage governments on this topic. Moreover, many participants felt that governments are not always open for discussions.

Other participants felt that national security is a genuine concern and cannot be overlooked. If shutting down the internet is for the greater good, then it should be allowed.

A participant said that as much as we believe the power is in the hands of government and internet service providers, the true powers is with the African consumers and techpreneuers. African start-ups should take back their internet and spearhead this conversation.

A call for more involvement of governments on panels to get the answers that are needed and pave the way forward collectively.

Gender Reporting

- Estimate the overall number of the participants present at the session:

- 25 Participants in the session

- Estimate the overall number of women present at the session:

- 9 Women in the session

- To what extent did the session discuss gender equality and/or women's empowerment?

- n/a

- If the session addressed issues related to gender equality and/or women's empowerment, please provide a brief summary of the discussion

- n/a