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DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION IN AFRICA REPORT



GHANA

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374 Borno Way, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria
Email: media@paradigmhq.org
www.paradigmhq.org

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CREDITS

Country Report:
Zita Ursula Zage

Editorial Team:
'Gbenga Sesan
Hlengiwe Dube
Nnenna Paul-Ugochukwu
Thobekile Matimbe

Translators:
Paper Bag Africa

Copy Editor:
Sabine Matsheka

Design & Layout:
Kenneth Oyeniya



Ghana

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study analyses Ghana's digital rights and inclusion landscape across three thematic areas – online freedom of expression, universal service funding, and digital participation of persons with disabilities. It highlights the status of press freedoms, policy gaps expanding rural connectivity, and persistent digital divides excluding marginalised groups. Several stakeholder-targeted recommendations are proposed, including government accountability, measures to protect journalists, targeted investments in underserved communities, multi-stakeholder partnerships making ICTs affordable and accessible, and robust and inclusive policy-making embracing co-creation with persons with disabilities to ensure Ghana leverages digitisation to empower all citizens. The report synthesises evidence from diverse sources to objectively diagnose challenges, examine stakeholder concerns, and spotlight groups at risk of exclusion. It provides targeted recommendations across policy, regulation, infrastructure expansion, affordability programs, digital skills building, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure Ghana harnesses connectivity for inclusive development. Barriers must be addressed at legal and institutional levels to achieve universal empowering access. While Ghana can potentially be a digital rights model in Africa, realising this vision requires targeted interventions to confront

systemic marginalisation across all segments of society. The research employed desk research to assess quantitative and qualitative government data, NGO reports, and news articles.

Introduction

Formerly known as the Gold Coast, Ghana gained independence from colonial rule in 1957 and became the first sub-Saharan nation to do so. It is the second-most populous and second-largest economy in West Africa and holds significant influence in the socio-political and economic affairs of the region. The country has maintained political stability since 1992 and established itself as one of the most stable democracies on the continent with eight successful general elections. Despite being previously ranked among the top three in Africa for freedom of speech and press freedom, there is growing concern about the deterioration of press freedom in Ghana. According to the World Bank, Ghana has recently grappled with profound macroeconomic challenges, including currency depreciation, escalating inflation, and diminished investor confidence, leading to a sombre economic outlook and slow growth forecasts. The World Bank's forecast indicates that Ghana's economy is expected to continue growing at a slower pace in 2024 but is envisaged to recover to its potential growth by 2025.³³⁴ Youth groups and trade unions have been leading peaceful demonstrations in response to rising living costs and perceived government mismanagement.

As digital technologies become integral to society and the economy, critical questions arise about those who benefit from connectivity and those who are excluded. For rapidly digitising countries like Ghana, technology must translate into empowerment and opportunity for all population segments. However, systemic barriers continue to exclude many from full participation in the digital revolution. This report delves into Ghana's progress, identifies gaps, and highlights policy priorities across three crucial digital rights and inclusion dimensions: online freedom of expression, the Universal Service Fund, and the digital participation of persons with disabilities. Despite achieving significant milestones in expanding internet access and establishing a legal framework protecting free speech, substantial challenges persist, as evidenced by a modest decline in global press freedom rankings.

Violence against journalists by officials and questions about the effectiveness of universal service funds in bridging urban-rural divides are alarming trends. Women and Persons with disabilities (PWDs) face barriers such as device costs, digital literacy gaps, and limited accessibility features, hindering their access to and use of technology.

334 World Bank 'Ghana's Economy Expected to Recover Its Potential By 2025, says World Bank Report' (2023) <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/07/19/ghana-economy-expected-to-recover-its-potential-by-2025-says-world-bank-report> (accessed on 29 December 2023).

► Country Analysis

Internet Access and disruptions

Ghana has witnessed consistent improvements in internet access and quality, boasting a mobile internet penetration rate of 71.51% and a fixed-line penetration of 0.33%, as of January 2023.³³⁵ According to Data Reportal's Digital 2023 report, the internet penetration rate in the country had achieved a level of 68.2%.³³⁶ Over 50% of the country's population were online in 2023. Ghana has undertaken substantial initiatives to enhance internet infrastructure, exemplified by projects such as Google's CSquared, which involved laying fibre-optic cables in major cities. On the other hand, the recent implementation of the "e-levy" tax on mobile money transactions has impacted mobile money demand, resulting in a resurgence of cash-based transactions.³³⁷ The government has lowered the Communications Service Tax to address declining revenue from traditional voice calls and is contemplating taxing digital services.

In 2022, the World Bank approved US\$200 million for the government's Digital Acceleration Project, aimed at enhancing internet access in rural areas and promoting digital inclusion.³³⁸ However, despite these efforts, a persistent digital divide exists, particularly affecting women and persons with disabilities (PWDs), hindering their access to and utilisation of digital technologies.

Ghana's population exceeds 30 million,³³⁹ with women constituting 50%. Nevertheless, a United Nations study revealed that only 60% of Ghanaian women own smartphones, compared to 72% of men.³⁴⁰ Factors contributing to this gender disparity, as highlighted by Tech Cabal, include inadequate literacy and digital skills among Ghanaian women.³⁴¹

In terms of internet freedom, the Freedom House report designates Ghana as 'partly free' due to obstacles in access, violations of user rights, and content restrictions.³⁴² Although the country experiences minimal internet disruptions, planned blackouts can intermittently interrupt access for some residents. While rural areas in Ghana lack internet infrastructure, efforts are underway to bridge the urban-rural digital divide through initiatives such as the Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications (GIFEC).

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335 NCA-Ghana 'Data Subscription Analysis for December 2022 to January 2023' <https://nca.org.gh/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Mobile-Data-Year-ended-2022-Jan-2023.pdf> (accessed on 27 December 2023).

336 Data Reportal 'Digital 2023: Ghana' (2023) <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-ghana> (accessed on 27 December 2023).

337 International Centre for Tax & Development 'Ghana's new e-levy: the sour, sweet and switches so far' (2023) <https://www.ictd.ac/blog/ghana-e-levy-sour-sweet-switches/> (accessed on 27 December 2023).

338 Techcabal 'Gender inequality is obstructing Ghana's path to a larger digital economy' (2023) <https://techcabal.com/2023/08/03/gender-inequality-is-obstructing-ghanas-path-to-a-larger-digital-economy/> (accessed on 2 February 2024).

339 Worldometer 'Ghana Population Live' (2024) <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/ghana-population/> (accessed on 2 February 2024).

340 United Nations Ghana 'DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality in Ghana- An Op-ed by Charles Abani, UN Resident Coordinator in Ghana' (2023) <https://ghana.un.org/en/225010-digital-all-innovation-and-technology-gender-equality-ghana-op-ed-charles-abani-un-resident> (accessed on February 2024).

341 Techcabal 'Gender inequality is obstructing Ghana's path to a larger digital economy' (2023) <https://techcabal.com/2023/08/03/gender-inequality-is-obstructing-ghanas-path-to-a-larger-digital-economy/> (accessed on 2 February 2024).

342 Freedom House 'Freedom on the net 2023 - Ghana' (2023) <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-net/2023> (accessed on 27 December 2023).

Online Freedom of Expression

Despite the improvements in Ghana's internet infrastructure, challenges to online freedom persist. With its constitutional commitment to freedom of expression, Ghana previously held a prominent position as a champion of free speech in Africa, ranking among the top three countries for both freedom of speech and press freedom. However, recent developments present a grim picture of the erosion of these rights.

In the 2023 Reporters Without Borders rankings, Ghana experienced a decline of two positions, dropping from 60th to 62nd out of 180 countries.³⁴³ These rankings consider cumulative scores from five key indicators: media landscape, political environment, legislative framework, economic factors, and security considerations. While Ghana boasts a robust legal framework for media regulations, the rankings reveal a gap between the existing legal structure and implementation, including the actual safety and security conditions for journalists. This disconnect underscores the imperative for concerted efforts to bridge the gap between media laws and their effective implementation in the country. The decline in ranking signifies a decrease in global standing and underscores the urgent challenges facing freedom of expression in the nation. Disturbingly, attacks on media houses and journalists have become increasingly common, with state security entities and political party supporters emerging as primary perpetrators.

On May 3, 2023, a distressing incident highlighted the concerning trend when Abubakari Sadiq Gariba, a journalist affiliated with Dagbon FM in northern Ghana, was physically assaulted and threatened during his live weekly talk show "Panpantua" by local politician Iddrisu Hardi and resident Mumuni Osman.³⁴⁴

Despite legal actions taken against the assailants, there is a persistent and disconcerting lack of accountability and support for journalists who experience such attacks. In response to Abubakari's arrest, authorities imposed fines of GHC 3,600 (approximately USD 310) each on Hardi and Osman, prompting questions about the effectiveness of such measures in deterring future incidents.³⁴⁵ Another alarming occurrence transpired on October 7, 2023, when approximately 20 individuals stormed the studios of Accra-based United Television (UTV) during a live broadcast.³⁴⁶ As reported by Media for Foundation West Africa, additional recent evidence highlighting the deteriorating safety conditions of journalists in Ghana includes the arrests or detention of Kwabena Bobie Ansah (Accra FM) and Noah Dameh (Radio Ada).³⁴⁷ The High Court (Criminal Court 5 Division) granted national security operatives leave to detain freelance journalist Sacut Amenga-Etego for unauthorised filming, deemed a security threat to the court and its complex. Reports also detail incidents such as thugs storming the studio of Benya FM and police assaulting and detaining Connect FM's Eric Nana Gyetuah.³⁴⁸ In total, the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) documented 45 cases of assault and attacks against journalists and media institutions in the last five years.³⁴⁹

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343 Rsf 'Ghana' (2023) <https://rsf.org/en/country/ghana> (accessed on 29 January 2023).

344 GhanaWeb 'Press Freedom Day: Former NDC communications officer attacks radio presenter on live radio in Tamale' (2023) <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/television/news/Press-Freedom-Day-Former-NDC-communications-officer-attacks-radio-presenter-on-live-radio-in-Tamale-185168> (accessed on 27 December 2023).

345 Global Voices 'Silencing the press: Threats, violence, and injustices against journalists in Ghana' (2023) <https://globalvoices.org/2023/11/20/silencing-the-press-threats-violence-and-injustices-against-journalists-in-ghana/> (accessed on 27 December 2023).

346 Myjoyonline 'UTV condemns invasion of its studio by 'intruders'; demands justice' <https://www.myjoyonline.com/utv-condemns-invasion-of-its-studio-by-intruders-demands-justice/> (accessed on 28 December 2023).

347 Mfwa 'Ghana's poor press freedom ranking – The critical issues' (2023) <https://www.mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/ghanas-poor-pres-freedom-ranking-the-critical-issues/#:~:text=The%20country%20fell%20two%20places,2022%20to%2065.93%20in%202023.> (accessed on 27 December 2023).

348 Mfwa 'Ghana's poor press freedom ranking – The critical issues' (2023) <https://www.mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/ghanas-poor-pres-freedom-ranking-the-critical-issues/#:~:text=The%20country%20fell%20two%20places,2022%20to%2065.93%20in%202023.> (accessed on 27 December 2023).

349 Daily Guide Network '45 Journalists Assaulted in Ghana In 5 Years; GJA Calls For End To Impunity' (2023) <https://dailyguidenetwork.com/45-journalists-assaulted-in-ghana-in-5-years-gja-calls-for-end-to-impunity/> (accessed on 28 December 2023).

These incidents collectively paint a distressing picture of the challenges facing journalists in Ghana, highlighting the need for comprehensive measures to ensure their safety, uphold freedom of expression, and protect the media’s vital role in society. Government efforts to address these issues have been sluggish and ineffective. Little progress has been made in establishing mechanisms for reporting and addressing attacks on journalists. Government intervention in content removal in Ghana is infrequent. In February 2021, legal representatives of the Judicial Service requested media houses to remove content it termed as “hateful” and “offensive” statements, but there were no reported compliance cases. In 2022, Google received two content removal requests from the government. It adhered to one related to impersonation and rejected the other on national security grounds. The Electronic Transactions Act, 2008, shields service providers from liability for illegal user content if they act promptly upon notification and are unaware of its illegality.³⁵⁰

Currently, Ghana is on the verge of voting on draft legislation called the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and the Ghanaian Family Values Bill. The Bill is aimed at criminalising both online and offline activities depicting positive portrayals of LGBT+ relationships. Should the legislation pass, internet service providers (ISPs) and website owners may find themselves compelled to proactively remove content to avoid potential legal consequences for posts supporting LGBT+ activities.³⁵¹ This Bill, which has the potential to criminalise the existence of LGBTQ+ individuals and restrict their online rights, adds another layer of concern. According to reports from TechPolicy, should the Bill be enacted, it could result in heightened surveillance, increased arrests, and the censorship of LGBTQ+ content.³⁵² Furthermore, traditional chiefs have been implicated in censoring the media, as exemplified by the Ada Traditional Area’s ban on Radio Ada from covering the traditional festival, Asafotufiam.³⁵³ The Kumasi Traditional Council took a similar stance by ordering the closure of Oyerepa FM.³⁵⁴

Despite Ghana’s constitutional commitment to freedom of expression, the challenges mentioned above underscore the evident necessity for further efforts to align the digital rights situation in Ghana with international standards and practices. This imperative arises from the fact that while the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill’s potential passage could lead to the discrimination of LGBTQ+ individuals, violating principle 3 of the 2019 Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa,³⁵⁵ the persistent arrest and censorship of the media also contravene principles 10 and 20 of the Declaration.³⁵⁶

Digital Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

Digital technologies, especially mobile phones and the Internet have become indispensable tools for participation in society and the economy. In 2022, Ghana’s internet penetration rate was

350 Freedom House ‘Freedom on the net 2023 - Ghana’ (2023) <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-net/2023> (accessed on 27 December 2023).

351 Freedom House ‘Freedom on the net 2023 - Ghana’ (2023) <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ghana/freedom-net/2023> (accessed on 27 December 2023).

352 Tech Policy ‘Ghana’s Anti-LGBTQ+ Agenda Will Be A Disaster For Human Rights — Online And Off’ (2023) <https://www.techpolicy.press/ghanas-antilgbtq-agenda-will-be-a-disaster-for-human-rights-online-and-off/> (accessed on 27 December 2023).

353 The Fourth Estate ‘Ada Traditional Council bans Radio Ada from covering 2022 Asafotufiami Festival’ (2022) <https://thefourthstategh.com/2022/08/09/ada-traditional-council-bans-radio-ada-from-covering-2022-asafotufiami-festival/> (accessed on 27 December 2023).

354 Mfwa ‘Ghana: Kumasi Traditional Council’s censorship order untenable’ (2022) <https://www.mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/ghana-kumasi-traditional-councils-censorship-order-untenable/> (accessed on 29 December 2023).

355 African Commission on Human and People’s Rights ‘Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa’ (2019) https://www.achpr.org/public/Document/file/English/Declaration%20of%20Principles%20on%20Freedom%20of%20Expression_ENG_2019.pdf (accessed 30 January 2024).

356 African Commission on Human and People’s Rights ‘Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa’ (2019) <https://achpr.au.int/en/node/902> (accessed 30 January 2024).

53% of the total population.³⁵⁷ As of the beginning of 2023, the rate increased to 68.2% out of a population of 33.80 million.³⁵⁸ This indicates that 10.75 million people in Ghana did not use the internet at the start of 2023. Thus, at least 31.8% of the population remained offline. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, PWDs constitute eight per cent of the population, which represents 2,098,138 individuals.³⁵⁹

Progress has been made in the advancement of the digital inclusion of PWDs. The government has demonstrated commitment through digital skills training workshops³⁶⁰ and policy initiatives like the Inclusive Education Policy³⁶¹ and the Ghana Disability Act.³⁶² Ghana passed the Persons with Disability Act in 2006 and became the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). However, it has not yet ratified the African Disability Protocol, which specifically addresses the unique challenges faced by the African disability community, including those related to the digital environment.³⁶³ Continued efforts are needed to fully implement these legal frameworks. The Persons with Disability Act mandates accessibility of public facilities and services, including Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), but much accessibility work remains.

PWDs have lower rates of mobile phone ownership and mobile internet usage than people without disabilities. Research conducted by GSMA found that PWDs are 34% less likely to own a mobile phone and 72% less likely to own a smartphone. Only 16% of PWDs use mobile internet, compared to 61% of persons without disabilities. The main barriers reported by PWDs are the cost of gadgets, low literacy levels, and the disability itself.³⁶⁴ These barriers affect their ability to take advantage of the benefits of digital technologies. Mobile phones and the internet can support PWDs to live more independently. Technology, particularly assistive technologies, enables access to information, government services, education, health information, financial services like mobile money, and social connections. However, for PWDs to fully benefit, mobile devices and services should be accessible.

The GSMA research also revealed that awareness of accessibility features that make mobile phones usable for PWDs is still very low in Ghana. For example, only 18% of respondents with disabilities were aware of screen magnifiers and 12% of text-to-speech technology that converts written text into spoken words. Without knowledge of these features, PWDs face greater difficulties in using mobile devices. Accessibility should be built into technology design from the start so that PWDs can use and benefit from digital technologies with minimal barriers.³⁶⁵

Affordability is another key barrier.³⁶⁶ Smartphones with more sophisticated accessibility features

357 Data Reportal 'Digital 2022: Ghana' (2022) <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-ghana> (accessed on 19 November 2023).

358 Data Reportal 'Digital 2023: Ghana' (2023) <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-ghana> (accessed on 19 November 2023).

359 Ghana News Agency 'Persons with Disability and Ghana's Economy Today' (2022) <https://gna.org.gh/2022/11/persons-with-disability-and-ghanas-economy-today/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%202021%20Population,population%2C%20which%20represents%20%2C098%2C138%20individuals.> (accessed on 19 November 2023).

360 Graphic online 'Govt builds capacity of PWDs in digital technology' (2022) <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/govt-builds-capacity-of-pwds-in-digital-technology.html> (accessed on 19 November 2023)

361 Special Attention Project Ghana 'Inclusive Education Policy' (2013) <https://sapghana.com/data/documents/Inclusive-Education-Policy-official-document.pdf> (accessed on 19 November 2023).

362 Special Attention Project Ghana 'Persons With Disability Act, 2006 Act 715' (2006) <https://sapghana.com/data/documents/DISABILITY-ACT-715.pdf> (accessed on 19 November 2023).

363 Stakeholders call on Minister to speed up the ratification of the African Disability Protocol (2023) <https://gna.org.gh/2023/08/stakeholders-call-on-minister-to-speed-up-the-ratification-of-the-african-disability-protocol/> (accessed on 25 January 2024).

364 GSMA 'Closing the Mobile Disability Gap in Ghana: Insights and Recommendations' (2022) <https://www.gsma.com/mobil-fordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Closing-the-mobile-disability-gap-in-Ghana.pdf> (accessed on 19 November 2023).

365 GSMA 'Closing the Mobile Disability Gap in Ghana: Insights and Recommendations' (2022) <https://www.gsma.com/mobil-fordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Closing-the-mobile-disability-gap-in-Ghana.pdf> (accessed on 19 November 2023).

366 B&FT online 'Digital representation matters—Fostering Internet inclusion among PWDs' (2022) <https://thebftonline>.

are often too expensive for PWDs who already experience economic exclusion. The cost of internet data also prevents more frequent use. Stakeholders, including the public, private and nonprofit sectors, should contribute to addressing the affordability challenge through subsidies, special pricing, financing schemes, and other innovations. Low levels of digital skills and literacy among PWDs exacerbate the digital divide in Ghana.³⁶⁷ Developing proficiency in mobile device usage, mobile internet, accessibility features, and online services enhances connectivity among PWDs and empowers them to fully utilise digital technologies. Organisations that focus on PWDs can provide customised technology and skills training. Digital skills should also be integrated into the school curriculum.

While compiling this report, finding comprehensive information about the barriers facing PWDs in Ghana was challenging. The scarcity of information underscores an overarching issue: the need for enhanced data collection methodologies and systematic reporting mechanisms specifically tailored to capture the nuanced experiences of PWDs in the digital realm. A more robust and targeted approach to data collection is imperative to gain a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted challenges that hinder digital inclusion for PWDs. Moreover, the lack of comprehensive data may signify a broader gap in awareness and recognition of the unique obstacles faced by PWDs in the digital space. Efforts to bridge this informational void should extend beyond mere data collection to include initiatives that raise awareness about the importance of digital inclusion of PWDs and foster a more inclusive approach to policy-making and program implementation.

PWDs themselves should be at the forefront of digital inclusion efforts. PWDs must be included in policymaking and technology design processes. When solutions are co-created with PWDs, they best meet diverse needs. Already, PWD organisations are driving inclusion through advocacy campaigns, peer support networks, and assistive technology programs. With greater opportunities to get online, PWDs can make their voices heard.

Digital inclusion of PWDs requires combined effort across stakeholders. The government, mobile industry, nonprofits, international organisations and PWDs have an important role. Through multi-stakeholder partnerships, affordable and accessible technology, awareness-raising, digital skills training, implementation of inclusive policies and user-centred design, the disability digital divide can be closed. This will empower PWDs in the political and socio-economic spectrum.

Universal Service Fund

The Universal Service Fund (USF) is crucial in fostering connectivity and narrowing the digital gap within countries. In 2008, Ghana established its own USF to extend communication access and services nationwide. This was achieved through a 5% levy imposed on telecom revenues. Financial contributions to Ghana's USF come from licensed Mobile Network Operators (MNO), Internet Service Providers (ISPs), and interest accrued from investments.³⁶⁸

The Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications (GIFEC) serves as the administrator responsible for ensuring equitable progress. GIFEC centrally coordinates proposals and disbursements. However, questions about sustainability arise, particularly with the distribution of 95% of accumulated funding over the past two years.³⁶⁹

The Ghanaian government allocated 155 million Ghana Cedis to rural broadband services in 2023,

[com/2022/01/31/digital-representation-matters-fostering-internet-inclusion-among-pwds/](https://www.bftonline.com/2022/01/31/digital-representation-matters-fostering-internet-inclusion-among-pwds/) (accessed on 19 November 2023).

367 B&FT online 'Digital representation matters—Fostering Internet inclusion among PWDs' (2022) <https://thebftonline.com/2022/01/31/digital-representation-matters-fostering-internet-inclusion-among-pwds/> (accessed on 19 November 2023).

368 GIFEC 'Source of Fund' (2019) <https://gifec.gov.gh/source-of-fund/> (accessed on 10 December 2023).

369 Emerald 'Bridging the digital divide in Africa via universal service funds: an institutional theory perspective' (2023) <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/ITP-01-2023-0042/full/html> (accessed on 10 December 2023).

underscoring its commitment to rural connectivity, as outlined in a GSMA Sub-Saharan Africa report from October 2023.³⁷⁰ Despite this commitment, the tangible impact of combating exclusion remains uncertain, and the fund's website lacks financial and project expenditure reports. GSMA and Boateng et al. argue that ineffective monitoring and reporting hinder impact evaluation.³⁷¹³⁷²

The Fund actively supports flagship initiatives such as the Rural Telephony and Digital Inclusion Project, launched in 2021, which involves installing over 3,000 cell sites and fibre in underserved locations across Ghana's 16 regions (GIFEC, 2023). Officials highlight these efforts as successes in expanding broadband connectivity.

However, the actual impact of reducing exclusion gaps is a subject of debate. Ghana's global connectivity ranking is still modest at 108th.³⁷³ Disparities persist between rural and urban areas, with only 28% rural adoption compared to 57% in urban regions. Moreover, the economically disadvantaged are six times less likely to access mobile internet.³⁷⁴ Even targeted groups like women face challenges, being 41% less likely than men to use mobile internet.

370 GSMA 'Universal service funds in Africa Policy reforms to enhance effectiveness' (2023) <https://www.gsma.com/subsaharanafrica/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/USF-Africa.pdf> (accessed on 10 December 2023)

371 Emerald 'Bridging the digital divide in Africa via universal service funds: an institutional theory perspective' (2023) <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/ITP-01-2023-0042/full/html> (accessed on 10 December 2023).

372 GSMA 'Universal service funds in Africa Policy reforms to enhance effectiveness' (2023) <https://www.gsma.com/subsaharanafrica/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/USF-Africa.pdf> (accessed on 10 December 2023)

373 Myjoyonline 'Ghana ranks 108th in Global Gender Gap Index' (2023) <https://www.myjoyonline.com/ghana-ranks-108th-in-global-gender-gap-index/> (accessed on 10 December 2023)

374 GSMA 'Universal service funds in Africa Policy reforms to enhance effectiveness' (2023) <https://www.gsma.com/subsaharanafrica/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/USF-Africa.pdf> (accessed on 10 December 2023)

▶ Conclusion & Recommendations

Conclusion

In tackling the digital rights situation in Ghana, a multi-stakeholder approach should be considered. This approach would address issues like internet and mobile phone affordability through subsidies, special pricing, financing schemes, and other innovations. Stakeholders, including government bodies, non-profit organisations, and research institutions, should work collaboratively towards reporting on the myriad barriers confronting PWDs. Collective action is required to ensure Ghana leverages connectivity for empowerment and prosperity for all. Based on the analysis in this report, the following recommendations are proposed to promote digital inclusion and internet freedom in Ghana:

Recommendations

Government:

- » Establish protections, reporting mechanisms, and accountability for violence against citizens
- » Reform and strengthen the National Mass Media Commission to safeguard press freedom
- » Protect vulnerable and marginalised groups such as women PWDs and the LGBTIQ+ by refraining from enacting legislation that will enable their censorship, surveillance, or arrests
- » Develop, review and update comprehensive legislation that addresses digital rights, including privacy protection, freedom of expression, and access to information
- » Publish regular detailed reports on USF project expenditures and evaluations
- » Prioritise USF investments in underserved communities.
- » Commission independent assessments on USF performance in closing digital divides
- » Allocate adequate budgetary resources to implement inclusive ICT policies and programs

Parliament:

- » Strengthen legal protections for media freedom, censorship, data privacy, digital security and safety of journalists.
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Media:

- » Conduct regular awareness campaigns through various media platforms to educate the public about digital rights, including the importance of the right to privacy, access to information and freedom of expression.
- » Facilitate open dialogues and provide platforms for deliberating on laws and policies that protect digital rights in collaboration with policymakers, legislators, civil society, and regulatory bodies. Collaborations amplify the message and strengthen advocacy efforts.
- » Advocate for developing and amendment legislation that protects digital rights, including press freedom.
- » Litigation and legal support: advocate for the legal protection of journalists.
- » Work with relevant stakeholders to initiate digital literacy and digital security programs to empower media practitioners and citizens with the knowledge and skills to navigate the digital space safely. This includes understanding online threats, recognising false information, and protecting personal data. Training sessions on digital security for journalists and other media practitioners are important to ensure the security of their communications and protection from online threats.
- » Monitor and report violations:
- » Establish effective mechanisms to monitor and report digital rights violations and cases of press freedom infringement.
- » Combat the proliferation of information disorder: Actively promote and practise high ethical standards in reporting to ensure that the public consumes accurate information.

Civil Society:

- » Engage in public awareness campaigns to educate the public about using digital technologies and human rights in the digital age.
 - » Develop and support initiatives that enhance digital literacy, including digital security. Digital literacy ensures that the public is informed about their rights in the digital age and the risks associated with navigating the digital space.
 - » Establish meaningful collaborations with policymakers and regulatory bodies to contribute to developing frameworks that promote and protect digital rights.
 - » Advocate for adopting and implementing frameworks that relate to the intersection of technology and society calling for accountability and transparency in government and private sector.
 - » Monitor the implementation of legal frameworks and expose practices that threaten digital rights.
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- » Provide legal assistance in digital rights violations and engage in strategic litigation to challenge infringements of digital rights through unjust laws and practices.
 - » Continuously engage in research and evaluate the impact of technologies on human rights and propose rights-based approaches to technology use and development.
 - » Foster regional and global collaborations to tackle issues of common interest, including cross-border digital rights concerns.

Private sector :

- » Make ICTs more affordable and accessible, particularly for PWDs, by incorporating inclusive design principles into technology products serving the Ghanaian market.
 - » Collaborate with the relevant stakeholders in promoting digital literacy, through for instance, the provision of sponsorship for events, workshops, and educational initiatives.
 - » Align business models with the UN Business and Human Rights Principles to ensure the incorporation of human rights due diligence.
 - » Collaborate with policymakers and regulatory bodies in developing frameworks on technology and its impact on society.
 - » Ensure transparency in addressing cases of violations and responses to governments.
 - » Continuously and diligently conduct technology impact assessments and adopt approaches that promote positive outcomes for the public in line with international norms and standards.
 - » Foster relevant collaborations on international and cross-border matters related to digital rights.
 - » Prioritise cybersecurity measures to protect the digital public from cyber threats such as unauthorised access or data breaches.
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