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DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION IN AFRICA REPORT

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Sudan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report discusses the digital rights issues and the state of digital inclusion in Sudan in the year 2023. The report provides recommendations to the government including the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), Rapid Support Forces (RSF), civil society and the media. 2023 is considered one of the worst years for digital rights in Sudan. The authorities practised several digital authoritarianism features, especially during the conflict between SAF and RSF, such as network disruption, censorship, information manipulation and legal abuse. Both conflicting parties violated citizens' privacy, disrupted the Internet, and used information manipulation as a military deceptive technique. The conflicts caused a disaster to the ICT infrastructure in the country, but some government institutions tried to resume their work using alternative digital platforms. Also, the Universal Service Fund (USF) had little activity due to the war. To demonstrate some of the key developments, this report relies on desktop research, interviews, as well as insights from the practical experience of working on digital rights in Sudan.

Introduction

Sudan lies at the crossroads of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, located in northeastern Africa. It is bounded on the north by Egypt, on the east by the Red Sea, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, on the south by South Sudan, on the west by the Central African Republic and Chad, and on the northwest by Libya.[863] Since the ousting of the authoritarian regime of Al-Basheir in 2019, which ruled Sudan for 30 years, the Sudanese people gained hope to build a democratic country after the last revolution.[864] However, the military did not let this hope move forward as Sudan is now ruled by a military regime since October 25, 2021, when Lt. Gen Burhan led a military coup against his partners in the transitional government which came after the Sudan uprising. To date, the Sudanese people have been living in a bad situation since the fierce war broke out between SAF and RSF.[865]

As of January 2023, Sudan's total population was 47.49 million. However, 13.49 million citizens use the Internet, which leads the internet penetration to stand at 28.4%.[866] According to data from GSMA Intelligence, there were 32.59 million cellular mobile connections in Sudan at the start of 2023.[867] There are four main Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in Sudan, three of which are foreign-owned (Zain, MTN, and Canar) and the fourth is Sudatel, whose board of directors includes a member of the Transitional Sovereign Council,the Head of State,and the Minister of Finance.[868] To demonstrate some of the key developments, this report predominantly relies on desktop research as well as insights from the practical experience of working on digital rights in Sudan. This report focuses on key developments related to Internet freedom, privacy and surveillance, developments in ICT and emerging technologies, and a review of the Universal Service Fund.

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863   Britannica, "Sudan", https://www.britannica.com/place/Sudan, (accessed on 15 November 2023).

864   BBC, "Omar al-Bashir: Sudan's ousted president", https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-16010445, (accessed on 12 November 2023).

865   Aljazeera, "100 days of conflict in Sudan", https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/24/100-days-of-conflict-in-sudan-a-timeline, (accessed on 20 December 2023)

866   Data Portal, "DIGITAL 2023: SUDAN", https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-sudan, (accessed on 21 November 2023).

867   Data Portal, "DIGITAL 2023: SUDAN", https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-sudan, (accessed on 21 November 2023).

868   Sudatel, Board of directors, https://www.sudatel.sd/investor-relations/governance/board-of-directors/, (accessed on 21 November 2023).

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Country Analysis

Internet Freedom

The internet space in Sudan is under the state's control as the internet freedom index continues to fall. According to the Freedom On The Net 2023 report, Sudan's score for internet freedom is 30 out of 100, which is classified as "Not Free".[869] This ranking covers the second half of 2022 and the first half of 2023. The first half of 2023 witnessed numerous events that limited internet Freedom and violated the citizens' digital rights, including network disruptions, censorship, and state-based disinformation.

Internet access and disruptions

Sudanese people are used to internet shutdowns as the authorities usually use internet shutdowns during political or civil unrest and during the national exams.[870] On April 16, 2023, the Telecommunication and Postal Regulation Authority (TPRA), the sector regulator, sent a shutdown order to MTN Sudan, before cancelling it later.[871]

In 2023, internet connectivity was unstable due to complications of the ongoing conflict. Most of the reported internet disruptions were due to logistical issues, including the inability to deliver t fuel to feed power generators because of frequent power outages.

The lack of fuel and unstable power supply led to service outages in May for two major ISPs in Sudan. MTN Sudan announced a blackout on their service as they were unable to deliver fuel to their data centres.[872] Sudani (Sudatel) also announced that their service was unreliable due to the instability in the power supply.[873] In addition, the Canar company witnessed almost 83 hours of outage between April 21 and 25 April, 2023. Also, Zain Sudan experienced a 10 hour outage on April 24.[874] The cities of Algenena, Zalinge, and Nyala, also witnessed long internet disruption periods due to the conflict there.[875]

There may be other internet disruptions in several areas in Sudan due to the conflict, but it is hard to verify this information using internet measurement tools.

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869   Freedom House, "Freedom On The Net 2023, Sudan", https://freedomhouse.org/country/sudan/freedom-net/2023, (accessed on 21 November 2023).
870   CIPESA, "Sudan Conflict Affects Digital Communications and Critical Services Delivery", https://cipesa.org/2023/06/sudan-conflict-affects-digital-communications-and-critical-services-delivery/, (accessed on 22 November 2023)
871   Reuters, "UPDATE 1-Sudanese telecoms provider MTN restores internet service - MTN official", https://www.reuters.com/article/sudan-politics-internet-idUSL1N36J071, (accessed on 21 November 2023)
872   Facebook, MTN Sudan, https://www.facebook.com/mtnsudan1/posts/pfbid0RuTMk8uFU2XMDFy2fsdXvq9BeaqqEHpe4G-mrHzbfp2mmFnsmgJ1iTp7BAiutnEiZl?__cft__[0]=AZUyUk-ahByzx-jtUl8pejKEKlZzipflgTLzBEmWpj8Mc_ZD4a5nvm2pRmlA1sibGvKnN-uTSANHttSs21KeR4voYbMrNlh0UCbP-hk-PeG1oWW4CmkT_90sJhoDmEkr3koyvWDzGonSAdVD5kktOWkb&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R, (Accessed on 21 November 2023)
873   Facebook, Sudani, https://www.facebook.com/SUDANI.SD/posts/pfbid0sxhpzevYFHj1aJYt5ziiBW7kxJQgAAcEZVacuGm5g-TRDjfUiWs9LfEMAZXjPWR1Ml?__cft__[0]=AZX3eB9z8MDWXyNUVTZHeMPY35hNAPkX7viGF88-qQzITJRwzjTll_nhVVP0TZeQW3g5jQD-qNTLD2vGmRyP0b5roKWBBcu3xjkH1qTWasgyTjiH81VloxS_daTlgVFhnyUc&__tn__=%2CO%2CP-R, (accessed on 21 November 2023)
874   CloudFlare, "Effects of the conflict in Sudan on Internet patterns", https://blog.cloudflare.com/sudan-armed-conflict-impact-on-the-internet-since-april-15-2023/, (accessed on 21 November 2023)
875   Freedom House, "Freedon on the net in Sudan 2023", https://freedomhouse.org/country/sudan/freedom-net/2023, (accessed on 22, November 2023)

Online Freedom of Expression

The Sudanese authorities used to block websites that had political influence or covered human rights issues. In 2023, there have been no reported website blockages, except for the taking down of the Rapid Support Forces website, according to their claims[876]. Moreover, the authorities used to arrest journalists, activists, and digital rights advocates to silence their voices against violations. This year, numerous arrest cases have been reported. On April 11, the Sudanese police arrested Yasir Mirghany, the head of the Sudanese Consumer's Protection Society (SCPS), due to claims of corruption related to European Union (EU) funds received by the SCPS in 2012. Earlier, the society's registration was cancelled and its bank account was suspended, making it harder to pursue its activities. SCPS was known for fighting against internet shutdowns using legal instruments.[877]

In January 2023, Azza Aira, an activist from Eastern Sudan, posted on Twitter (now X) that she received a threat from the Governor of the Red Sea State, Mohamed Adroub Kalmoub.[878] In addition, in March 2023, while documenting the demolition of houses in Khartoum, journalist Ikhlas Nimir, who occasionally shares her work on her public Facebook page and has previously worked for online media outlets, was beaten and arrested for 10 hours, the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate said.[879] Also, on May 30th, 2023, journalist. Nader Shulkawi, who posted clips that he took in Omdurman and uploaded on YouTube, was arrested in the Omdurman area, western Khartoum, by the RSF.[880]

Despite residing outside Sudan, authorities have relentlessly pursued online activists. In March 2023, the General Intelligence Service (GIS) filed a lawsuit against Dalia al-Tahir, a Sudanese journalist based in Libya, alleging that she had spread "false information" regarding the strained relationship between the RSF and the GIS.[881]

Privacy and Surveillance

The state-based surveillance and privacy violations in Sudan have a bad record as the authorities have used different technologies from several vendors in different eras. In the previous decade, reports indicated that Sudanese authorities imported spyware including Remote Control System (RCS) from the Italian company "Hacking Team" and surveillance tools from the Canadian company, Blue Coat.

Two privacy violation cases were reported in 2023. Mubarak Ardol, the former manager of the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company (SMRC) and a leader in the Social Justice Democratic Coalition political party, claimed that his phone was being tapped by the RSF using the "Predator" spyware, which RSF imported in 2022.[882] In Addition, Diaeldin Bilal, a journalist based in Qatar,

876   Twitter, @RSFSudan , https://twitter.com/RSFSudan/status/1648793014876139523, (accessed on 25 November 2023)
877   Front Line Defender, "HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER YASIR MIRGHANI RELEASED ON PERSONAL GUARANTEE", https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/human-rights-defender-yasir-mirghani-released-personal-guarantee, (accessed on 25 November 2023)
878   Twitter, @azaa_aira, https://twitter.com/azaa_aira/status/1620158627054223360, (accessed on 25 November 2023)
879   Facebook, Sudanese Journalists Syndicate, "Statement of Public Opinion: Sudanese Union of Journalists condemns the police targeting the fellow journalist Ikhlas Tiger of physical harm and forced detention, in Khartoum today, Sunday," Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/sdjsofficial/posts/pfbid021v8S5x6J57Prq1BP6AEno8FkcsTDb91iUX3oxyn477u44cMiJQmMC9RrrjHaPzG-ml, (accessed on 25 November 2023)
880   CPJ, "", https://cpj.org/2023/06/sudanese-paramilitary-soldiers-detain-journalist-nader-shulkawi/, (accessed on 25 November 2023)
881   Sudan Today, "المخابرات تدون بلاغا في مواجهة صحيفة الحراك وصحافية والتنسيق لاحضارها بـ"الانتربول [The intelligence raised a lawsuit against Al-Hirak newspaper and a female journalist, and coordinates to bring her by Interpol]", March 4, 2023, https://sudan2day.net/archives/16204, (accessed on 25 November 2023)
882   Facebook, Mubarak Ardol, https://www.facebook.com/mubarak.ahmed.359/posts/pfbid035uCwdVMgxwkPgkjKa5We-8gUrahHDEb12GJZSSBoJcUie3ojyjsBHxrmL5JxUUxy6l, (accessed on 27 November 2023)

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announced that his SIM card was hacked and called on people not to engage with any messages or requests received in his name.[883]

Furthermore, the authorities in Sudan used to inspect citizens' phones to get data. During the ongoing conflict, it was reported that RSF was inspecting citizens' phone contents to ensure that they were not in conflict with any intelligence service.[884]

Data Protection

Sudan currently lacks a comprehensive data protection law.[885] Despite this absence, Article (20-1) of the 2013 Regulation for Organizing Payment Systems mentioned that payment service providers must take necessary measures to protect and preserve user data.[886] However, the Electronic Banking System's (EBS) failure to provide electronic banking clearing services has given rise to an unregulated market, allowing bank customer transactions to proceed without government oversight.[887]

E-banking users in Sudan have faced irregular outages, causing disruptions to their financial transactions. This struggle opened a space for a digital currency parallel market -a black market- as some IT specialists developed two online platforms to assist e-banking users in Sudan. The first platform provides real-time updates of the status of each bank application, while the second provides transactions between bank accounts using their personal accounts, taking commissions regarding this service. The Central Bank of Sudan or EBS does not have any control over the flow of money through this platform.[888]

Development in ICT and Emerging Technologies

Despite the impact of the conflict on the digital infrastructure in Sudan, Sudanese governmental institutions worked to mend the issue by providing digital services to citizens. According to the TPRA website, Sudan has three long-term plans for digital inclusion that include the Quarter-Century National Strategy for Communications Plan, the General National Telecommunication Emergency Plan (GNTEP), and the Broadband Plan.[889] The above-mentioned plans were developed early on but as of the end of 2023, Sudan still needed a national strategy or plan to develop Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications.

However, numerous government services have dropped due to the RSF takeover of the Telecommunication Building in eastern Khartoum, which contains the government's data centres. The Internet Society Chapter of Sudan reported that only 12% of the Sudanese Country Code Top Level Domain (ccTLD) websites and services were functional as of June 2023.[890] Due to this, several

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883   Nabd AlSudan, "مجهول اخترق هاتف صحفي شهير [Anonymous one hacked a phone of a famous journalist]", https://nabdsudan.com/archives/85949, (accessed on 27 November 2023)

884   SMEX, Internet and Telecom Shutdowns in Sudan: Who is responsible?", https://smex.org/internet-and-telecom-shutdowns-in-sudan-who-is-responsible/, (accessed on 27 November 2023)

885   Data protection Africa, "Sudan", https://dataprotection.africa/sudan/, (accessed on 1 December 2023)

886   Central Bank of Sudan, "Regulation for Organizing Payment Systems", https://cbos.gov.sd/ar/content/%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A3%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%B9, (accessed on 1 December 2023)

887   Consultative Group to Assist the Poor, "Sudan Dispatch: Inclusive Finance in Times of Crisis", https://www.cgap.org/blog/sudan-dispatch-inclusive-finance-in-times-of-crisis, (accessed on 1 December 2023)

888   Global Voices, The ongoing conflict's impact on ICT and digital transformation efforts in Sudan", https://advox.globalvoices.org/2023/10/21/the-ongoing-conflicts-impact-on-ict-and-digital-transformation-efforts-in-sudan/, (accessed on 1 December 2023)

889   TPRA, "Plans", https://tpra.gov.sd/regulation-issues/publications-2/qos-reports-3-2-4/, (accessed on 26 December 2023).

890   Twitter, @ISOCsd, https://twitter.com/ISOCsd/status/1669695388541128705?s=20, (accessed on 2 December 2023)

government online platforms became nonfunctional. However, some government institutions created alternative platforms to resume service provision, including but not limited to the Medical Council, Police, and the Spokesperson.[891] Moreover, the Ministry of Higher Education directed higher education institutions and universities to resume the education process via digital platforms.[892] On April 17, a fire broke out at the Ministry of Higher Education building, including in the data centre. The fire caused significant damage to the building and its contents.[893] Good news came later as the Sudanese Certificate data was securely backed up in a cloud storage system, which means that student records and exam results were safe and accessible.[894]

It is clear from the above that the GNTEP was not implemented optimally, as the plan mentioned that government entities and commercial service providers must "replace basic physical communication infrastructures that have been damaged or destroyed; installing mobile phones or Tetra mobile stations that could rapidly deliver telecommunications services in less than 24 hours (16 hours for the main cities); and providing new facilities for telecommunications services".[895] In November 2023, the Minister of Telecommunication and Digital Transformation mentioned that the Ministry is working to create a new National Data Center in Portsudan, the interim capital of Sudan.[896]

Despite the conflict complications, the Civil Registry Administration was the most distinctive government entity in the digital sphere. The central passport printer was damaged due to the conflict in Khartoum, but services continued to operate due to the online passport platform, which allows citizens to schedule appointments for passport applications and submit their paperwork without having to visit the passport office.[897] The Civil Registry sends appointment confirmations to citizens via WhatsApp. The platform allows citizens in eight cities in Sudan and six cities in five other countries to apply for and renew their passports. As such, the Sudanese citizens who fled the country due to the conflicts can renew their passports from remote locations and visit the passport office to provide their biometric data. This development resolved the passport crisis because many citizens inside the country could not travel abroad because they had lost their identification when they fled during the conflict.

Internet legal framework

The internet-related legal framework in Sudan has many laws that fully and partially govern data and the Internet. Sudan has ratified key international human rights instruments including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)[898], and the African Charter on

891   Global Voices, The ongoing conflict's impact on ICT and digital transformation efforts in Sudan", https://advox.globalvoices.org/2023/10/21/the-ongoing-conflicts-impact-on-ict-and-digital-transformation-efforts-in-sudan/, (accessed on 2 December 2023)

892   Nabd AlSudan, "موجهات لبدء التعليم في مؤسسات التعليم العالي[Guidelines for starting education in higher education institutions]", https://nabdsudan.com/archives/81713, (accessed on 1 December 2023)

893   Twitter, @AJArabic, https://twitter.com/AJArabic/status/1647880074887065604?lang=ar, (accessed on 3 December 2023)

894   Hodhod news, "التربية.. معلومات الشهادة السودانية مجمعة تحت سحابة إلكترونية[Education.. Sudanese certificate information collected under an electronic cloud]", https://hodhodnews.net/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AC/, (accessed on 3 December 2023)

895   TPRA, "Sudan National Telecommunication Emergency Plan", https://web.archive.org/web/20220709164158/https://tpra.gov.sd/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NETP-Sudan-june-30.pdf, (accessed on 1 December 2023)

896   Nabd Alsudan, "[Establishing a national data center in Port Sudan to restore electronic services] إنشاء مركز بيانات قومي بـ بورتسودان لـ استعادة الخدمات الإلكترونية", https://nabdsudan.com/archives/89551, (accessed on 30 December 2023)

897   Sudan Passports, "الإدارة العامة للجوازات والهجرة نظام الحجز الإلكتروني[General Administration of Passports and Immigration electronic reservation system]", https://passports.gov.sd/, (accessed on 3 December 2023)

898   United Nations, "View the ratification status by country or by treaty, Sudan", https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/

Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)[899], which guarantee the right to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and the right to receive, impart and disseminate information. On March 15 2023, Sudan signed the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection.[900]

However, the Interim Constitutional Charter of 2019 guarantees the right to access the Internet with some limitations as it stipulates: "Every citizen has the right to access the internet, without prejudice to public order, safety, and morals under what is determined by law."[901] Most of Sudan's internet-related laws have terms that are vague, non-defined, and may be misused by the government. The Telecommunication and Postal Regulation Authority Act (TPRA) mentions that "anyone may not access telecommunication or eavesdrop on or monitor it without permission from the prosecutor or a competent judge."[902]

Furthermore, the Cybercrimes law has undergone several modifications since its first draft in 2007, replaced by a brand new law in 2018, and then amended in 2020. In November 2022, the Cabinet -Council of Ministers passed a new amendment that criminalised insulting state leaders and agencies and obliged the authorities to impose imprisonment and a fine against offenders.[903] The full text of the law had not been published by the time of writing this report.

However, the current Cybercrimes law gives the so-called "competent authority" the right to violate the citizens' privacy. The law imposes punishment through imprisonment, a fine or both for anyone who violates the privacy of the citizens. However, the same article considered the same actions not a crime if they came under the authorisation of the public prosecutor, judicial or competent authority. The term "competent authority" is a broad term, making the law subject to misuse.[904]

The National Security Law has some repressed articles. One of them is Article 25 because it gives unlimited power to the General Intelligence Service (GIS) to violate citizens' privacy. It stipulates: "The security service has the right to request information, data, documents or things from anyone to check it or take it". The law gives the Sudanese GIS full authority to do this without any court order, which exposes citizens to violations under the pretext of security.[905]

The Sudanese National Council, or Parliament, passed the "Right to Access Information Act" in 2015. This is the first law related to information accessibility in Sudan. Even though the law has been legislated, it remains idle. For example, the law mandates the establishment of "The Commission for the Right to Access Information" as the regulator for accessing information at any public institution but nothing has been done to set up this Commission, which means citizens still cannot exercise

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TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=165&Lang=en, (Accessed on 23 January 2024)

899   African Union, African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, https://achpr.au.int/en/charter/african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights, (Accessed on 23 January 2024)

900   African Union, "LIST OF COUNTRIES WHICH HAVE SIGNED, RATIFIED/ACCEDED TO THE African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection",https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/29560-sl-AFRICAN_UNION_CONVENTION_ON_CYBER_SECURITY_AND_PERSONAL_DATA_PROTECTION.pdf, (accessed on 27 November 2023)

901   Constitute Project, "Sudan's Constitution of 2019", art. 57 (2) https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Sudan_2019.pdf?lang=en, (Accessed on 1 December 2023).

902   TPRA law, art 74, http://tpra.gov.sd/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Telecommunications-and-Postal-Regulation-Act.pdf.

903   Sudan spokesperson platform, "Approval of the Anti Cybercrimes law for the year 2022", https://web.archive.org/web/20230203065147/https://spokesperson.gov.sd/?p=2565, (accessed on 1 December 2023)

904   Combating Cybercrimes law, art 23, https://moj.gov.sd/files/download/204.

905   National Security Law, art 25, https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2016-11/Sudan%20National%20Security%20Act%202010%20%28AR%29.pdf.

their right to information.[906]

The law has many defects that limit the freedom of access to information because it lists 12 types of categorised information that are restricted from citizens, including information related to "national security" and "foreign policy". As mentioned in the above laws, these terms are ambiguous, which allows the authorities to limit the people's ability to fully access information, which restricts the path to transparency and accountability. Article 10(g) further undermines citizens' ability to access information by empowering any public institution to enforce fees on citizens requesting information. The Act does not oblige the information holders any duty to proactively disclose information in their possession. [907]

The Regulation on Filtering and Blocking Websites and Web Pages on the Internet, for the year 2020, gave the TPRA the right to block websites without judicial order while requiring the citizens to go to court to unblock the websites. Broad terms such as "belief" have been mentioned in the regulation to justify website blocking. The regulation didn't define what "belief" is.[908]

However, despite these negative aspects of the legal framework in Sudan, there are some encouraging provisions such as those mentioned in the Regulation of Filtering and Blocking Websites and Web Pages on the Internet, and the Regulation for Licensing and Regulating the Work of Financial Institutions for Mobile Payment.The first regulation requests that ISPs block all child pornography websites, weapons websites, and all sites that spread hate speech, racism and religious discrimination. The second regulation requires mobile payment service providers to encrypt all transactions with End-to-End Encryption.

Universal Access Fund

The Universal Access Fund project started in Sudan in 2003 when the Information Technology Development Council was formed. It was then incorporated into the Information Technology Development Fund in the year 2005, and finally, the Universal Access Fund was established in the year 2018, according to TPRA law.[909]

The regulator, TPRA, conducts annual surveys for the comprehensive service project. As of 2018, the survey targeted, for the first phase, 55 areas not covered by communication networks, in order to collect correct data and then classify them in terms of economic feasibility (17 feasible areas and 38 non-feasible areas). Economically unfeasible areas are covered with the support of the Universal Service project. As for the economically feasible areas for the operators, they are covered by the operators by including them in their annual coverage plans.[910]

As mentioned above, the RSF took over the TPRA tower in Khartoum, which contains the main governmental data centres, including the government web servers. So, the TPRA website -which contains the USF information- was not accessible for information.

Reports of two USF-funded projects have been found online, both posted before the conflict in

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906   Advox, "Unfreedom Monitor Report: Sudan", https://advox.globalvoices.org/2022/08/04/unfreedom-monitor-report-su-dan/, (accessed on 1 December 2023).
907   Global Voices, "The case for reforming the Sudanese Access to Information Act", https://globalvoices.org/2019/08/28/the-case-for-reforming-the-sudanese-access-to-information-act/, (accessed on 1 December 2023)
908   Advox, "How the government in Sudan legalized internet categorizing and content filtering", https://advox.globalvoices.org/2022/08/02/how-the-government-in-sudan-legalized-internet-categorizing-and-content-filtering/, (accessed on 3 December 2023).
909   TPRA, "Universal Service Fund", https://tpra.gov.sd/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Universal-Service-Fund.pdf, (accessed on 4 December 2023).
910   TPRA, "Universal Service Fund", https://tpra.gov.sd/regulation-issues/%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%a7%d8%b1%d9%8a%d8%b9/universal-service/, (accessed on 14 December 2022).

Sudan. The first project is the first phase of the "Development of National Data Center" project, which is a data centre planned to provide all digital government services such as applying admission requests to universities, applying for Islamic religious rituals including Hajj and Umrah, the Sudanese certificate (national secondary exams), the primary school certificate, governmental fees collection, and the national mail, in addition to the website hosting service for governmental institutions. The project was reported by the Sudan official news agency without declaring how much of the Fund's money was used.[911]

The second USF-funded project, reported by the Director of the Research, Development and Quality Control Department in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research[912] was the development of the infrastructure of the Sudanese Research and Education Network (SudREN). SudREN was supported by two ISP-scale routers, in addition to a licence that enables the routers to provide transmission bandwidth up to 10 Mbps, which represents 10 times the old bandwidth. SudREN also known as "Universities Network", is a network that connects most of the higher education institutes in Sudan. The TPRA General Director was contacted for comment about the USF projects and the fund amount in 2023 and shared that there were no projects in 2023 due to the war.

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911   Sudan News Agency, "اكتمال المرحلة الأولى من مشروع تطوير مركز البيانات الوطني[The first phase of the National Data Center Development Project has been completed]" https://suna-sd.net/posts/%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A, (accessed on 7 December 2023)
912   Facebook, وليد محمد المبارك احمد, https://www.facebook.com/hebo5/posts/pfbid0vX8PBqqsLNJYwFEKu1F3J2foEgFVMp-4mgemdcwyMxExJ5mb12XEpWeBiXZ4CgZmgl, (accessed on 8 December 2023)

Conclusion & Recommendations

Conclusion

The ongoing conflict in Sudan has a major negative impact on ICT infrastructure. Numerous government digital services were disrupted, while some governmental institutions created alternative platforms to provide their services to citizens. Both RSF and SAF do not allow citizens to practise their digital rights using different tools, including network disruptions, online information manipulation, and physical electronic device inspection. Reports show authorities arresting and verbally warning activists and politicians for online criticism of the government. The conflict's impact on the ICT infrastructure, government platforms, and the citizens' data made the dream of digital inclusion and transformation a distant one. However, the government has no plans to keep up with modern technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). Sudan's government did not mention any preparation for any AI plans or regulations.

Recommendations

The government (including SAF) should do the following:

» Stop issuing network disruption orders.

» Amend the laws of (Combating Cybercrimes, 2018 (amendment of 2020, and the non-published amendment of 2022), Press and Press Publications of 2009, Telecommunication and Post Regulation Authority, 2018 and National Security of 2010 (amendment of 2020), which contain vague terms and imposing harsh and disproportionate punishments on the state workers.

» Implement the Access to Information Act to increase access to information, reducing the spread and impact of disinformation.

» Reduce the telecommunication tax, ensuring affordable data.

» Derive benefits from the reduced telecommunication tax by using it to develop the ICT sector in the post-conflict era.

» Provide the resources that will assist the telecommunications companies in providing accessibility to the conflict areas.

» Refrain from targeting citizens, journalists, and activists based on online activities.

To the Rapid Support Forces (RSF):

» Stop targeting ICT infrastructure.

» Refrain from targeting citizens, journalists, and activists based on their online activities.

» Stop targeting telecommunications engineers and workers working under conflict circumstances.

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» Refrain from targeted surveillance and impunity through stealing citizens' phones and other electronic devices.

Civil Society:

» Push against digital authoritarianism practices by encouraging regional and international support and mobilising the resources to pressure the government to stop repressing human rights.

» Raise awareness through training and media campaigns.

» Provide digital safety training to targeted people with spyware or physical inspection campaigns.

Media:

» The media and press in Sudan should continue their efforts to detect and document digital authoritarianism incidents.

» Press institutions should work to protect their staff by building strong coalitions and pushing against the laws used to repress journalists.

» The Syndicate of Journalists should provide digital safety training to its members.

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