

# LONDA



2021



**The Gambia Digital Rights and Inclusion Report**

# LONDA

**THE GAMBIA DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION 2021 REPORT**

A PARADIGM INITIATIVE PUBLICATION

**Published by Paradigm Initiative**

374 Borno Way, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria

Email: [media@paradigmhq.org](mailto:media@paradigmhq.org)

[www.paradigmhq.org](http://www.paradigmhq.org)

Published in May 2022

Report written by Nasiru Deen

Editorial Team: 'Gbenga Sesan, Kathleen Ndong'mo, Hlengiwe Dube, Margaret Nyambura

Ndung'u, Mawaki Chango, Nnenna Paul-Ugochukwu and Thobekile Matimbe.

Cover Page design by Kenneth Oyeniya

Design & Layout by Luce Concepts

Images credit @ Pexels

This publication may be reproduced for non-commercial use in any form provided due credit is given to the publishers, and the work is presented without any distortion.

Copyright © 2022 Paradigm Initiative



Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**01**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**02**

INTRODUCTION

INTERNET ACCESS, DISRUPTIONS,  
AND DIGITAL EXCLUSION

**03**

COMPLIANCE WITH REGIONAL AND  
INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

**06**

HATE SPEECH, MISINFORMATION, AND  
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ONLINE

**08**

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

**09**

ANALYSIS OF THE GAMBIA'S PERFORMANCE  
FROM THE YEAR 2020

**10**

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**LONDA**

THE GAMBIA DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION 2021 REPORT

A PARADIGM INITIATIVE PUBLICATION

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After the ousting of a long-time dictatorship in 2016, The Gambia began its transition into a democracy. The year 2021 marked the end of a five-year transition period and the first post-dictatorship elections.

It was thus a significant year in highlighting the major gains in digital rights and inclusion The Gambia has made in the past five years. Like many of the years in this period, there were a few infringements of digital rights by the State and non-state actors. There were also a number of legal and policy reforms, as well as strategy developments geared towards the better protection of digital rights and better digital inclusion.


However, as a result of poor implementation of these reforms and strategies, as well as the existence of poor infrastructure, major challenges remain in regards to the protection of digital rights and digital inclusion in The Gambia.



## INTRODUCTION

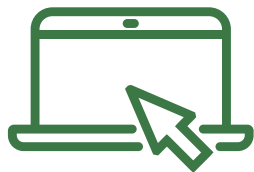


# DIGITAL RIGHTS AND INCLUSION IN THE GAMBIA



The Gambia, a former British Colony, is situated on the western coast of Africa.<sup>1</sup> It is the smallest non-island nation in Africa with a population of approximately 2.1 million people inhabiting its narrow strip of land measuring 10, 689 sq. km, making it one of Africa's most densely populated countries.<sup>2</sup> The Gambian economy primarily relies on tourism, rain-dependent agriculture and remittances from Gambians living overseas.<sup>3</sup> The country's current gross domestic product (GDP) was

estimated at USD\$1.90 billion, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This figure, as per World Bank estimates, represents less than 0.01% of the global economy.<sup>4</sup> The Gambia experienced a 22 year dictatorship (1994-2016) and is now five years into a democratic transition with President Adama Barrow winning a second term in office in the country's first post-dictatorship elections in December 2021.<sup>5</sup>



## 23.7%

**INTERNET PENETRATION  
RATE**

### INTERNET ACCESS, DISRUPTIONS, AND DIGITAL EXCLUSION

According to DataReportal, there were 580,200 internet users in The Gambia as of January 2021, which represents an internet penetration rate of 23.7%. While this number marks a significant increase from the previous year,<sup>6</sup> it is still

1. The Gambia: Colonial History, <https://ttag.gm/colonial-history> (accessed on 11 January 2022)

2. H A Gailey, "Britannica: Gambia Country Facts" <https://www.britannica.com/place/The-Gambia> (accessed on 11 January 2022)

3. GIEPA: Economy, <https://www.giepa.gm/node/34#:~:text=The%20Gambia%20has%20a%20small,and%20growth%20in%20the%20economy.> (accessed on 11 February 2022)

4. Trading Economics, "Gambia: GDP" <https://tradingeconomics.com/gambia/gdp> (accessed on 11 January 2022)

5. World Bank, "The Gambia Profile" <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gambia/overview#1> (accessed 11 January 2022)

6. S Kemp, "Digital 2021: The Gambia" <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-gambia> (accessed 11 January 2022)



### INTERNET DISRUPTIONS AFFECTED BUSINESS, EDUCATION AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

well below the 42% internet penetration average in West Africa,<sup>7</sup> making it one of the worst in the region. The majority of Gambians who can access the Internet, do so through their mobile devices, with fixed-line broadband services opted for by less than 20% of The Gambia's internet users.<sup>8</sup> Thus an increase in internet users over the past years can arguably be attributed to the existence of many mobile Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in the country. The main ISPs are Gamtel, Africell, Qcell, Comium and Netpage. Internet connectivity into The Gambia is managed by the state-owned Gamtel, with bandwidth sold to other ISPs. With the launch of the Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) submarine cable in 2011, the quality of connectivity improved significantly, albeit with lingering issues of reliability, accessibility and affordability.<sup>9</sup> Between January and February 2021, the country saw at least four nationwide disruptions each lasting between two and eight hours.<sup>10</sup> Gambians expressed that the disruptions in early 2021 interrupted business, education, and other critical activities which were for the most part being conducted online due to the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

These internet disruptions were reminiscent of those that occurred during the dictatorship that were solely aimed at stifling free speech and access to information, most notably, on the eve of the December 2016 presidential elections, when the ruling government ordered ISPs to shut down internet services, international calls, and SMS messaging across the country.<sup>12</sup> This was supposedly to disrupt the spread of false information, but in reality, this disrupted the process of vote counting and election monitoring. This however failed to guarantee the re-election of long-time ruler Yahya Jammeh who had overseen this shutdown.<sup>13</sup> The Minister of Information and Communication of The Gambia, Ebrima Sillah, did clarify that, unlike the internet blackouts in 2016, the recent outages were not a deliberate act of government but as a result of a “*power outage in the Senegal base Sonatel station that hosts the connectivity between The Gambia and Senegal, via the ACE cable.*”<sup>14</sup>



7. Statista, “Internet penetration rate in Africa as of January 2021, by region”

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1176668/Internet-penetration-rate-in-africa-by-region/> (accessed 15 March 2022)

8. International Telecommunication Union, “Mobile cellular subscriptions, 2000-2018,” June 2019, <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>. (accessed 12 January 2022)

9. Gambia, The - Country Commercial Guide, “Information and Communications Technology”

<https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/gambia-information-and-communications-technology> (accessed 11 January 2022)

10. Y Taylor, “The Gambia's Internet Shuts Down for over 14 hours on First Day of 2021,” Gainako,

<https://gainako.com/the-gambias-Internet-shuts-down-for-over-14-hours-on-the-first-day-of-2021/> (accessed 11 January 2022)

11. Jainaba Sonko, “A day without Internet is a day in the dark: The Gambia's growing digital divide,” Global Voices, <https://globalvoices.org/2021/03/31/a-day-without-Internet-is-a-day-in-the-dark-the-gambias-growing-digital-divide/> (accessed 11 January 2022)

12. Ruth Maclean, The Gambia bans international calls and Internet as voters go to polls, The Guardian:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/01/the-gambia-bans-international-calls-and-Internet-as-voters-go-to-polls> (accessed 12 January 2022)

13. Ibid

14. Supra no. 5

The 2021 presidential elections in The Gambia – the first post dictatorship presidential elections – validated the Minister’s statement to a certain degree, as in spite of widespread fears that the internet shutdowns of the 2016 elections would repeat themselves, the 2021 electoral period was free from any internet blackouts or shutdowns.<sup>15</sup> This demonstrated the ruling government’s commitment to open and fair internet access, even though reliability, accessibility and affordability remain a concern.

In the 2021 Freedom of the Net Report, The Gambia scores a measly 12 out of 25 in the category “Obstacles to Access”,<sup>16</sup> which primarily evaluates the infrastructural, economic, and political barriers to access the Internet.<sup>17</sup> The report highlights that the biggest obstacles to internet access in The Gambia are the infrastructural limitations (quality and speed), and the exorbitant costs.<sup>18</sup> On the cost of the Internet, the report notes that the *“high cost of internet remains a primary hindrance to internet access in The Gambia, where 48.6% of its over 2 million inhabitants live in poverty”*.<sup>19</sup> In 2020 ISPs including Africell and QCell increased their internet fees by 100% for unlimited monthly packages. QCell’s cheapest unlimited monthly package now starts at D3,800 (\$73.42) for one megabyte per second internet speed and up to D8,550 (\$165.21) for five megabytes per second internet speed.<sup>20</sup>

In their defence, ISPs have claimed that the high costs of internet services are as a result of a combination of high taxes levied on ISPs, high costs involved in acquiring and maintaining telecommunications equipment, and the small market of internet service consumers in The Gambia.<sup>21</sup>



15. #KeptOn coalition to The Gambia: uphold democracy this election, keep people connected <https://www.accessnow.org/keepit-on-the-gambia-election/> (accessed 12 January 2022)

16. Freedom on the net 2021, “The Gambia” <https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-net/2021> (accessed 12 January 2022)

17. Freedom-House, “What do we measure” <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net> (accessed 12 January 2022)

18. Supra no.10

19. Ibid

20. Supra no. 4

21. Madi Ceesay, “High Cost of Internet Services Triggers Misery in The Gambia”, The Daily News, May 11, 2021 <https://dailynewsgm.com/high-cost-of-internet-services-triggers-misery-in-the-gambia/> (accessed 29 March 2022)

According to Africell's Media Consultant, Musa Sisay, Africell spends over 800 million dalasi (USD 15 million) on tax per annum, in addition to other expenditures. A government official from the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) also confirmed that high taxes on telecom companies have contributed significantly to the high costs of internet services in the country.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of infrastructural limitations, the slow pace at which internet access has grown in The Gambia in the past decade can be linked in part to reduced government funding for regional internet cafés and telecentre hubs operated by national telecommunications company Gamtel.<sup>23</sup> Further, there exists a rural-urban divide in terms of access. In general, rural areas suffer from poor or virtually nonexistent infrastructure, a lack of electricity and/or frequent power cuts, and most ISPs in The Gambia (including the state-owned Gamtel) have not prioritised investments in network coverage in these rural areas.<sup>24</sup>

A 2021 Global Voices report confirms that children living in rural areas could not get to school or access learning materials online during the pandemic due to poor digital infrastructure in those parts of the country. As a result, these children stayed home for months, missing out on learning, whilst most of their counterparts going to school in the urban areas were able to access the Internet (albeit at exorbitant costs) to continue having lessons online.<sup>25</sup>

The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education

which provided school lessons on online platforms during COVID-19, tried to bridge this rural-urban digital gap by also providing those lessons on several TV and radio stations. However, many critics pointed out that similar to the lack of adequate digital infrastructure, most homes in rural areas do not have access to a TV or radio device.<sup>26</sup> This digital exclusion resulted in the infringement of the right to education of children living in the rural areas of The Gambia, as protected in The Constitution of The Gambia, 1997 which guarantees *"the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities"* with a view to achieving the full realisation of the right to education.<sup>27</sup>

In a bid to address the problems of access and affordability, the government of The Gambia approved the National Broadband Policy (2020 – 2024) which recognises the challenges that relate to the digital divide in accessing broadband services in The Gambia,<sup>28</sup> and highlights that the national fibre backbone (ECOWAN), which is connected to the ACE cable, is not accessible in some major settlements where the ECOWAN is not laid down.<sup>29</sup> The policy promises to address this gap in access *"in order to ensure that all parts of the country begin and take part in the measured digital revolution at the same time"*<sup>30</sup> and aims to provide an alternative backup to ACE Cable by the end of 2021 and to ensure that at least 75% of homes have affordable access to high-speed internet connectivity (defined as an upload and download rate of at least 5 Mbps) by the end of 2022.<sup>31</sup>

22. Ibid; also see The Gambia Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA), Legislative Mandate, <https://pura.gm/about-pura/overview-of-pura/> (accessed 30 March 2022)

23. Supra no. 11

24. Ibid

25. Supra mo. 6

26. APA Banjul, "Gambia adopts media schooling for basic education amid COVID-19" (April 2020) <http://apanews.net/en/news/gambia-adopts-media-schooling-for-basic-education-amid-COVID-19> (accessed 19 March 2022)

27. Constitution of The Gambia, 1997, S. 30 [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Gambia\\_2018?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Gambia_2018?lang=en) (accessed 13 January 2022)

28. The Gambia National Broadband Policy (2020 – 2024), p. 25 <https://moici.gov.gm/sites/default/files/2021-05/BROADBAND%20POLICY%202024.pdf> (accessed 13 January 2022)

29. Ibid, p. 10

30. Ibid, p. 10

31. Ibid,





In the end, the government of The Gambia had failed to meet its policy goal of providing an alternative backup to the ACE Cable. It thus remains to be seen whether it can achieve its ambitious goals of providing affordable high-speed internet to at least 75% of Gambian households by the end of 2022.

## HATE SPEECH, MISINFORMATION, AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ONLINE

As 2021 marked the year of The Gambia's first post-dictatorship presidential elections,<sup>32</sup> the right to freedom of expression, especially in political discourse, was put to the test, and the majority opinion was that this right thrived in The Gambia in 2021. This right is guaranteed in the Constitution of The Gambia, 1997 as the "freedom of speech and expression", and includes the "freedom of the press and other media".<sup>33</sup> A number of repressive media-related laws had in the past made the exercise of this right difficult. However, a number of media law-related reforms have taken place in the last five years, including the Supreme Court declaring as unconstitutional the law on false publication on the Internet, as well as other repressive pieces of legislation on defamation and sedition.<sup>34</sup> This has resulted in a better climate for the exercise of this right.

A 2021 AfroBarometer report confirms that a majority of Gambians believe that the media is in fact free to do its work without government interference.<sup>35</sup> This public perception was important, as it helped promote the semblance of a free and fair electoral process, where differing political views were expressed and publicised through the media, including social media and

outlets.<sup>36</sup> Digital inclusion, therefore, had an important role to play, as, without it, many citizens lacking internet connectivity would be left out of political discourses occurring in digital spaces.



**A 2021 AfroBarometer report confirms that a majority of Gambians believe that the media is in fact free to do its work without government interference.**

This inspired a project by Jokkolabs Banjul who sought to amplify the voices of rural women in The Gambia ahead of the December 2021 presidential elections. As Jokkolabs Banjul describes it, "the political battle for votes is now happening in online forums created on WhatsApp."<sup>37</sup> Its digital inclusion project, under the slogan "Digital inclusion: Not without our rural women", has enabled women

32. S Waan, The Point Newspaper, "PDOIS accepts IEC election result"

<https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/pdois-accepts-iec-election-result> (accessed on 13 January 2022).

33. Supra no. 19, S. 25.

34. MFWA, "Major Boost for Digital Rights in The Gambia" <https://www.mfwa.org/major-boost-for-digital-rights-in-the-gambia/> (accessed on 14 January 2022.)

35. AfroBarometer, "Gambians support media freedom but want government to prevent false news and hate speech, Afrobarometer survey shows" <https://afrobarometer.org/press/gambians-support-media-freedom-want-government-prevent-false-news-and-hate-speech> (accessed 14 January 2022).

36. Ibid.

37. Jokkolabs Banjul enabled digital inclusion for rural women in Gambia <https://www.apc.org/en/news/enabling-digital-inclusion-most-vulnerable-2020> (accessed on 14 January 2022).



to appreciate the power of technology using WhatsApp, including creating voice recordings to share their political perspectives in communities.<sup>38</sup>

With the advantages of the digital space in enabling the exercise of the freedom of expression in political discourse in The Gambia, comes some disadvantages in the form of hate speech and misinformation. The 2021 AfroBarometer Survey report discloses that more than eight in 10 citizens (84%) say that social media users spread information that they know is false.<sup>39</sup> The report also discloses that the citizens want the government to be able to limit or prohibit the sharing of news or information that is false (85%), hate speech (84%), and information or opinions that criticise or insult the president (76%).<sup>40</sup> The prevalence of misinformation in The Gambia led, in 2021, to the creation of Fact Check Gambia, which was developed to close the market gap for independent, non-partisan fact-checked and verified information, particularly about COVID-19 and the presidential elections.<sup>41</sup>

The platform was inspired by similar platforms in Ghana and Nigeria. Minister of Information, Ebrima Sillah at the launching of the online platform, highlighted that the initiative to set up a fact-checking platform in The Gambia could not have come at a better time when the country is preparing for a series of elections coupled with the rising trend of misinformation about COVID-19.<sup>42</sup> Since its establishment, factcheckgambia.org has published several articles debunking fake news and stories surrounding COVID-19 and the December presidential elections, among other pertinent issues. An example is an August 2021 fact-checking article debunking certain untruths about the COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>43</sup>

As the 2021 presidential elections beckoned, hate speech online became prevalent as well. A Gambia Press Union (GPU) research report discloses that in the last seven years, web-based publications published more hate speech than any other type of media, followed by print media.<sup>44</sup>

38. Ibid.

39. Gambians support media freedom but want government to prevent false news and hate speech, Afrobarometer survey shows [https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/press-release/The%20Gambia/news\\_release-gambians\\_support\\_media\\_freedom\\_within\\_limits-afrobarometer-2may21.pdf](https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/press-release/The%20Gambia/news_release-gambians_support_media_freedom_within_limits-afrobarometer-2may21.pdf) (accessed on 14 January 2021).

40. Ibid.

41. UNESCO-supported fact checking platform launched in The Gambia <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-supported-fact-checking-platform-launched-gambia> (accessed on 14 January 2022).

42. Ibid.

43. Factcheck Gambia "What you need to know about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine <https://factcheckgambia.org/the-jj-covid-19-vaccine-what-you-need-to-know-about-any-possible-side-effects/> (15 January 2022)

44. S Jammeh & Gambia Press Union, "Research on hate speech in The Gambia Media", p. 15 [https://gpu.gm//DataImages/PDFFiles/Resume\\_0\\_Research%20on%20hate%20speech%20in%20the%20Gambia%20Media.pdf](https://gpu.gm//DataImages/PDFFiles/Resume_0_Research%20on%20hate%20speech%20in%20the%20Gambia%20Media.pdf) (accessed 15 January 2022)

The report also confirms that much of hate speech in The Gambia, which is usually ethnic or political in nature, occurs on social media platforms (Facebook and WhatsApp in particular) and that unfortunately, some of these hateful WhatsApp messages or Facebook posts find their way into the mainstream media (print and broadcast).<sup>45</sup> While there is currently no specific law to counter misinformation and hate speech, the Criminal Offences Bill, 2020 which is before Parliament at the time of writing, will become the first legislation that specifically prohibits hate speech, if and when it successfully passes into law.<sup>46</sup>

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Gambia in August 2021 enacted its first-ever access to information legislation.<sup>47</sup> It was enacted following a consultative process by the Civil Society Coalition on Access to Information, spearheaded by the Gambia Press Union (GPU), who were determined to shed The Gambia's image as the only country in Anglophone West Africa without an Access to Information legislation.<sup>48</sup> Prior to this, The Gambia had undergone a repressive period in which the right to access to information enjoyed neither constitutional nor statutory protection. Even recent attempts to constitutionally protect this right through the 2020 Draft Constitution of The Gambia,<sup>49</sup> became unsuccessful, after the Draft failed to obtain parliamentary approval needed for its enactment.<sup>50</sup>

Under the former regime, over 20 web pages were blocked by the government, many of which were independent news and opposition news websites known for their criticism of the ruling government,<sup>51</sup> thus limiting access to public information that could be detrimental to the regime.



45. Ibid, p. 18.

46. See section 58 (2) of Criminal Offences Bill, 2020 2020-07-04 11:40 (squarespace.com) (15 January 2022)

47. AFEX, "Gambia's Journey to an Access to Information Legislation" P. 9 GPU-Report-on-ATI-Gambias-Journey-to-ATI\_MFWA.pdf (accessed on 15 January 2022).

48. Ibid.

49. Article 48, 2020 Draft Constitution of The Gambia available at [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Gambia\\_2020D?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Gambia_2020D?lang=en) (accessed on 15 January 2022)

50. Gambia: Lawmakers put brakes on reform process <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/gambia-lawmakers-put-brakes-on-reform-process/1991633> (accessed on 15 January 2022).

51. Freedom on the Net 2017 - the Gambia, available at [https://www.refworld.org/docid/5a547d01a.html#\\_ftn29](https://www.refworld.org/docid/5a547d01a.html#_ftn29) (accessed on 15 January 2022).

Back then, government officials argued that every citizen could access information from the State or any other organ or agency of the State except information that was likely to be “*prejudicial to the security or sovereignty*” of the State, or interfere with the right to privacy of another person.<sup>52</sup> This position was reflected in the provisions of the Official Secrets Act, 1922 (amended as of 2008), which prescribed penalties for any unauthorised possession, retention, and/or disclosure of official information.<sup>53</sup>

The Access to Information Act, is aimed at proactive and organised dissemination of public records and information to the people.<sup>54</sup> It repeals the repressive sections of the Official Secrets Act,<sup>55</sup> and has some implications on how Gambians digitally access information either from privately owned webpages or directly from government sources. Firstly, it grants previously repressed citizens the right to access and disseminate public information.<sup>56</sup> It also puts the onus on the government to make such public information easily accessible e.g. digitally.<sup>57</sup>

However, it has been admitted by government officials that many government Ministries and departments do not have official websites through which information about their work could be sourced, nor do they have official contact details such as an official email to facilitate the request of information.<sup>58</sup> As the right to access to information will be put to the test in the coming years, it is incumbent upon the government to put both the physical and digital structures in place to allow the easy storage, request, access, and dissemination of public information.

## ANALYSIS OF THE GAMBIA'S PERFORMANCE FROM THE YEAR 2020

The Gambia made slight improvements in terms of digital rights and inclusion from the year 2020. A major highlight is the passing into law of the Access to Information legislation, which provides proactive and organised dissemination of public records and information. This was after four years of civil society advocacy for the passing of the legislation. There were also increases in the number of internet users, as freedom of expression thrived on online spaces and platforms. Digital inclusion however remains a problem with infrastructural deficiencies leading to a rural-urban divide in terms of Internet connectivity. Costs of Internet connectivity also remain high thus limiting access for many Gambians who live in poverty.

Poor policy implementation has also ensured that the government of The Gambia failed to meet its target of providing an alternative backup to the ACE Cable by the end of 2021, which may lead to similar occurrences of Internet blackouts in 2022 as seen in 2021. It also offers little hope that the government would meet its target to connect at least 75% of Gambian households by the end of 2022.

52. Official Secrets Act, Article 6,

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a7c2ca18a02c7a46149331c/t/5f02515438f0572cbaa93fab/1593987424166/Official+Secrets+Act\\_1922+%28Cap+17.01%29.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a7c2ca18a02c7a46149331c/t/5f02515438f0572cbaa93fab/1593987424166/Official+Secrets+Act_1922+%28Cap+17.01%29.pdf) (accessed on 16 March 2022); also see Cipesa “Digital Rights in The Gambia” P.3 [https://cipesa.org/?wpfb\\_dl=290](https://cipesa.org/?wpfb_dl=290) (accessed 15 January 2022).

53. A Sowe “The Gambia’s missed opportunity for digital rights reform” <https://advoc.globalvoices.org/2021/03/31/the-gambias-missed-opportunity-for-digital-rights-reform/> (accessed on 15 January 2022).

54. Access to Information Act, 2021, Long Title, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ed6CfVYzfcUYJhsM2uMVbOiH198tf8-p/view> (accessed on 15 January 2022)

55. Ibid, Article 4.

56. Ibid, Article 11.

57. Ibid, Article 6.

58. 7th National Internet Governance Forum (Hybrid Format), The Gambia, Communiqué [https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot\\_download/7508/2639](https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/7508/2639) (accessed on 15 January 2022).



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Gambia has progressed notably in terms of digital rights and inclusion in the past five years post-dictatorship, and there are active efforts in place to further improve the status quo. However, major issues continue to negatively impact developments in digital rights and inclusion in The Gambia. Thus, the following recommendations ought to be considered;

### Government

Government needs to ensure that the rural-urban divide is addressed by putting better digital structures in place in rural areas to ensure a more inclusive digital space in The Gambia. Both Government and Private ISPs should provide Wi-Fi connectivity in public spaces throughout the country, at reasonable rates. Government must ensure that all schools, both public and private, are connected to the internet.

Government must also ensure that the high costs of internet services are addressed, by ensuring that the taxes and tariffs imposed by the state, which directly impacts cost and affordability, are reviewed and where possible reduced or removed.

Government must embrace e-governance, including ensuring that all government ministries and departments have websites, data centres, and digital communication channels. These digital structures within the government machinery would also enable easy access to public information, as per the ATI legislation.

### Civil Society

Media institutions must be trained and provided with the tools to curtail the spread of hate speech and misinformation on their platforms. Civil society organisations should also take the lead in creating public awareness on hate speech and misinformation, and in the tools needed to counter them.



***Government needs to ensure that the rural-urban divide is addressed by putting better digital structures in place in rural areas to ensure a more inclusive digital space in The Gambia.***

**Londa 2021 expands on last year's report with findings from 22 countries, examining themes of privacy, freedom of expression, access to information, segmentation and exclusion, digital transformation, affordability, gender and others within existing legislative frameworks, and against the backdrop of a widening digital divide. This edition captures the gaps and proffers recommendations to achieve a digitally inclusive and rights - respecting Africa.**



**Paradigm Initiative**

374 Borno Way, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria

Email: [media@paradigmhq.org](mailto:media@paradigmhq.org)

[www.paradigmhq.org](http://www.paradigmhq.org)

     @ParadigmHQ