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1 2 T H A R F S D S I D E E V E N T • 2 7 A P R I L 2 0 2 6

Turning the Tide through Social Inclusion

Enhancing Resilience and Digital Safety for Africa's Most Vulnerable Populations

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*“Africa’s sovereignty frontier has shifted —
from the territorial to the digital.”*

01 THE REFRAME

Access is not a standalone issue

Digital accessibility is, fundamentally, a **freedom-of-expression** question.

For rural communities, informal workers, women, sexual and gender minorities and other young key populations, access without safety can deepen harm. The same digital tools that promised voice are being used to surveil, profile, harass and silence.

THE QUESTION IS NOT ONLY

- 1 Who is connected**
the conventional access frame
- 2 Under what conditions**
with what protections in place
- 3 Who bears the risk**
when the system fails or is misused

02 THE TOOLKIT BEING WEAPONISED

How digital tools are being used to restrict, not expand, civic space



Targeted surveillance

Of activists, journalists, opposition figures and key populations — often using technologies procured without transparency or legal basis.



Shutdowns & throttling

Deployed around elections and protests — precisely when freedom of expression matters most.



Election-period interference

Platform manipulation and coordinated disinformation that hollow out democratic participation.



Online harassment & doxing

Gendered abuse against women, sexual and gender minorities, and human rights defenders — too often with impunity.

These are not isolated incidents — they form a coherent toolkit.

03 THE COLONIAL RETURN

Cybercrime laws as the new vehicle for old censorship offences

REPEALED FOR FAILING
CONSTITUTIONAL MUSTER

Sedition



Re-cast as “offences against state authority” online

Insult offences



Prohibitions on “insulting public officials” digitally

Criminal defamation



“Cyber defamation” and “injurious communications”

False news



“False information” / disinformation offences

A cybercrime law that re-criminalises criticism of the state is not a cybercrime law — it is a censorship law with a new vocabulary.

Leave No One Behind in design — not just in declarations

If LNOB is to mean anything in the ARFSD outcome document, it must shape the policy-making process itself — not just the goals it points to.



Co-design with affected communities

Young key populations, sexual and gender minorities, women and informal workers — in the room when bills are drafted, not consulted afterwards.



Independent expertise in the loop

Civil society lawyers, technologists and data-protection specialists must shape legislation — so we don't adopt frameworks our own institutions can't implement.



Resource the guardrails

Independent, properly funded data protection authorities, judiciaries and oversight bodies — because rights without enforcement remain on paper.

Otherwise, exclusion will be embedded in code — and we will spend the next decade litigating what we should have prevented.