

# Rights group launches tool to stem cybercrime in Africa

May 14 2021

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Victims of cyberbullying and related crimes can now get redress thanks to a new [online platform](#) that seeks to empower internet users across Africa to report digital rights violations.

The platform called Ripoti, a Swahili word meaning report, was launched last month (30 April) at the 2021 Digital Rights and Inclusion Forum. It links victims to expert support and enables them to document and track evidence of violations.

"Digital rights violations have been on a worrying [upward trend](#) in Africa," says Bulanda Nkhowani, Southern Africa program officer for Paradigm Initiative, which created the platform. "We may not be able to provide a percentage increase in changes that we observed but it's quite a spike that we could no longer cope with volumes. Every average citizen is a potential victim but activists, human rights defenders and journalists are more likely to be victims."

The violations vary from internet shutdowns, cyberbullying, and surveillance to illegal access to [user information](#).

Bulanda cites instances in countries such as Burundi, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda, Burundi and Tanzania where authorities have repeatedly shut down the internet, infringing on people's digital rights.

"For many governments, these violations are committed in their pursuit for unconstitutional and undemocratic political power," she tells SciDev.Net.

Both the United Nations resolution on promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights and the African commission resolution on the right to freedom of expression and information affirm these rights which should apply offline as well as online, she explains.

According to Bulanda, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated digital rights violations on the continent as most activities were pushed online.

"Some data privacy violations may have been committed through the use of contact tracing applications," she suggests.

Studies have shown that online gender-based violence increased significantly during this period.

The new platform seeks to provide redress for violations that usually go unnoticed when not reported. It also creates awareness of the different types of violations, which ones are more prevalent and pressing, and documents these into a body of evidence that can inform advocacy intervention by various partners.

Joshua Patrick Ogembo managing director at Mirror Ethics East Africa, an economic crimes management outfit, says that Ripoti is a timely intervention as cybercrime gains ground on the continent.

"Cybercrime is not only common in most African countries but also very complex," he tells SciDev.Net.

According to a report by Serianu, a Kenyan-based cybersecurity firm, cybercrime is estimated to cost Africa US\$4.12 billion dollars a year.

"In Kenya, for instance, reporting ordinary crime is a liability. And reporting cybercrime may seem impossible," Ogembo explains.

He added that data and information obtained illegally in the cyberspace is sold in the black market at a fee, with far-reaching economic, social and emotional consequences for victims.

"It is therefore refreshing to note that this platform seeks to help individuals to report such crimes and get redress," he says. "The platform resonates perfectly with our program at Mirror Ethics East Africa which enhances economic democracy and public participation."

Boye Adegoke, senior program officer at Paradigm Initiative, says the digital world has become a critical tool for economic activity as well as accessing emergency services and exercising fundamental freedoms.

"Recently, however, and compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, the

same space has been used for cyberbullying, online gender violence and illegal access and use of [internet users'](#) information," he explains, adding that his organization has for many years documented and offered litigation support to victims of digital rights violations.

"We had to adopt a more communal, strategic and systemic approach to these many incidents," he says.

**More information:** Ripoti: [www.ripoti.africa/](http://www.ripoti.africa/)

Provided by SciDev.Net

Citation: Rights group launches tool to stem cybercrime in Africa (2021, May 14) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-05-rights-group-tool-stem-cybercrime.html>

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