DEMOCRATIZING DIGITAL
Social Media Analytics Pilot

The Conflict, Peacebuilding, and Governance Division in the USAID Africa Bureau (AFR/SD/CPG), through Digital Frontiers, is funding a social media analytics pilot program with small grants to five local grantees to explore the potential uses of Social Media Analytics (SMA) in programing and information resilience in sub-Saharan Africa.

GRANTEES

FactSpace West Africa (Ghana)

Launched in 2019, FactSpace West Africa is a signatory to the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) Code of Principles, a series of commitments organizations abide by to promote excellence in fact-checking. FactSpace has executed fact-checking initiatives and projects in Ghana, The Gambia, Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The organization helps to tackle the weaponization of mis- and disinformation online through fact-checking, invests in researching the actors involved in promoting information disorder, trains journalists and the public to be digital literates, and helps build tools that are effective in fighting the spread of false information. FactSpace West Africa hopes to employ the learnings from this grant to curb the spread of mis- and disinformation in Ghana's 2024 elections.

Media Monitoring Africa (South Africa)

Media Monitoring Africa (MMA)'s goal is to promote ethical and fair journalism that supports human rights and to encourage a culture where media and the powerful respect human rights while promoting democracy and the ideals of a just and fair society. MMA employs technology, social media, and data tools to conduct successful media strategies for change. MMA has been working to combat mis- and disinformation since 2018, when the organization first approached the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) with concerns around the general elections set to take place in 2019. MMA built the Real411 platform, which enables members of the public to report their concerns about different online harms. Through this grant, MMA will contextualize reported mis- and disinformation with broader social media trends.

Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change (South Africa)

The Centre for Analytics and Behavioural Change (CABC) aims to amplify civil society messaging in the digital age to empower citizens and communities, working to actively counter worrying developments on social media and create meaningful positive change in society. Their activities span social media narrative analytics, advanced network analytics, communication strategy, creative content generation, online dialoguing and academic research and media partnerships to achieve high impact-based, expert-driven and evidence-based information. Through this grant, CABC will partner with FactSpace West Africa and MMA to broaden their impact through incorporating social media analytics in their ongoing work.

Nendo (Kenya)

Nendo is an award-winning professional services firm based in Kenya with experience spanning over 20 countries in Africa. Nendo delivers grounded African insights and trends through research and communications services. Nendo's work focuses on the impact of the internet, mobile phones, and social media on business, society, and culture across Africa. Nendo has built up expertise across a number of nonprofit sectors such as democracy, peace & security, gender, climate change, education, agriculture, public health, as well as private sector industries like telecoms, banking, airlines, among others. Nendo's work in digital landscaping, social media listening, and consumer trends has been featured in the New York Times, BBC and CNN among others. Through this grant, the organization will examine technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) trends related to prominent female social media content creators in Kenya. The results will be used to facilitate a co-creation event to discuss solutions and recommendations for addressing TFGBV.

Pollicy (Uganda)

Pollicy (a mash-up between "polling" and "policy") is on a mission to advance how data is conceptualized, used and reproduced for the development of just societies. Recognizing the critical importance of data, and the frequent lag in data collection and analysis in many African countries, Pollicy conducts trainings and workshops to increase the collection, production, and use of data among a wide range of stakeholders. Through this grant, Pollicy will partner with Nendo to examine TFGBV trends for prominent women in Kenya on social media. Pollicy will provide support on research design, data collection tools, and data analysis, contextualizing Nendo's results in a bigger picture.

DEMOCRATIZING DIGITAL

Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries are undergoing unprecedented digital transformation. Digital technology is revolutionizing industries, governments, economies, and societies. While the potential for these technologies is far-reaching, digital tools can accelerate and scale tactics that undermine the ability of citizens to exercise their basic rights and hold their governments accountable. Even as citizens and civil society leverage digital tools such as social media and encrypted messaging to communicate, organize, and advocate, governments and other malign actors are employing digital threats to democracy just as quickly. Digital threats to democracy refers to the use of digital tools and technology by the government, the private sector, or individuals to violate human rights. These include digital repression tactics such as surveillance, censorship, social manipulation and disinformation, internet shutdowns, and digitally-enabled targeted persecution. The 2022 Democratizing Digital Landscape Assessment, commissioned by the Conflict, Peacebuilding, and Governance Division in the USAID Africa Bureau (AFR/SD/CPG), suggested that USAID has an important opportunity to further integrate awareness of digital threats to democracy into its programming.

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYTICS?

Social Media Analytics (SMA) is a rapidly growing field within data science that leverages social media platforms to extract valuable insights, trends, and patterns. It involves collecting and processing publicly available content from social media platforms, including text, videos, and images, to generate valuable insights that support evidence-driven decision-making. SMA is an important emerging tool that can help USAID, other donors, and civil society identify and develop strategies to mitigate specific instances of digital threats to democracy in their countries of focus. By leveraging social media data, SMA provides valuable insights into the spread and impact of digital threats to democracy, especially social manipulation and disinformation, which enables informed decision-making and the development of effective mitigation strategies. In this way, SMA plays a pivotal role in safeguarding the integrity of the digital ecosystem.