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INTERNET FREEDOM CHALLENGES IN RURAL AREAS: Digital Discrimination!

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List of Acronyms

ICA	Interception of Communication Act
ICT	Information Communications Technology
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
MC	Media Centre
MMPZ	Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
POSA	Public Order and Security Act
POTRAZ	Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe
ZDI	Zimbabwe Democracy Institute

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

This paper done in partial contribution to ZDI and Media Centre investigation into the state of internet freedoms in rural communities of Zimbabwe examined: (i) how internet freedoms are a challenge in rural areas (ii) the state or extent of internet freedom in rural communities of Zimbabwe (iii) challenges to internet freedom in rural areas and how they have affected the right to information access, information sharing, freedom of expression and other internet freedoms. The purpose was to identify challenges regarding internet freedoms and locate strategies for promoting human rights in rural areas. Thus, following is a summary of key findings:

- This study found that in Zimbabwe, internet freedoms in rural areas are a challenge due to (i) poor or no adequate and effective information and communications infrastructure, (ii) restrictions on connectivity, (iii) blocking and filtering and (iv) low digital literacy level. Internet freedoms are mainly enjoyed by people in urban areas as reflected by the advent of digital activism centered primarily in Harare, Bulawayo and Mutare.
- Following the rapid uptake in internet usage across the globe, human rights defenders and human rights activists from across rural and urban areas became hopeful that internet freedoms would be enjoyed freely without any limitations emanating from the State.
- Internet freedom in Zimbabwe has remained fragile over the years, tormented by perennial government's efforts to restrict social media during

antigovernment protests and arbitrary arrests for online activities.

- Internet access and use in rural areas is critical for providing the basis for active participation in human rights governance and democratization process in Zimbabwe. This is because (i) rural areas in Zimbabwe constitute the largest population percentage of the country's total population, (67.72% in 2016 according to the World Bank collection of development indicators) and (ii) a very few people in rural areas have access to internet (23.12% of the total country's population on internet).
- In the context of the described background, this study sought to examine the state or extent of internet freedom in rural communities of Zimbabwe and how internet freedoms are a challenge in rural areas. As a result, the study sought to scrutinize the extent to which entities and agencies responsible for promoting human rights and democracy have adopted internet (social media) use for the purpose of promoting democracy in Zimbabwe rural communities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the rapid uptake in internet usage across the globe, human rights defenders and human rights activists from across rural and urban areas became hopeful that internet freedoms would be enjoyed freely without any limitations emanating from the State. Nevertheless, little or no significant progress has been made by the government of Zimbabwe to allow for the enjoyment of internet freedoms particularly in rural areas. The government has rather totally ignored advocacy campaigns for media law reforms that would ensure that internet freedoms are not jeopardized by the enacted statutes as the country nears 2018 harmonized elections. This has mainly affected the rural communities of Zimbabwe where human rights violations go unreported due to lack of fast and reliable communication mediums culminating from insignificant internet access. Thus, it is of paramount importance to identify ways in which internet freedoms are a challenge in the rural communities of Zimbabwe. To that end, various strategies need to be employed to ensure that internet freedoms in regard to information access, free expression and privacy are guaranteed in the rural communities. This is against a background that internet access is universally regarded as a basic human right and therefore should be free from state restriction(s).

Objectives

In light of the internet freedom challenges in rural areas in Zimbabwe, this advocacy paper seeks to contribute to the need to ensure that:

- a) Citizens of Zimbabwe living in rural areas are guaranteed access to internet for them to enjoy online freedoms entitled to them.
- b) Rural communities in Zimbabwe would not continue with their voices being

stifled due to lack of effective information and communications infrastructure.

- c) Government and Civil society work together to expedite the process of establishing adequate and effective information technology infrastructure in marginalised communities
- d) Citizens in rural communities are equipped with knowledge and enabled to engage duty-bearers to protect their internet freedoms.

Methodology

This study was purely qualitative in that, it used desk-research, content analysis and key informant interviews with purposively sampled key-informants drawn from social movements, academia, civic society leaders and media practitioners. An interview guide was created which had topics on how internet freedoms are a challenge in marginalized communities in the country and how the challenges have affected the right to information access, free expression and privacy as enshrined in the supreme law of the land.

2. POLITICAL CONTEXT

Online freedom in Zimbabwe has remained fragile over the years, tormented by perennial government's efforts to employ ridiculous country's ICT market controls, restrictions on social media during anti-government protests, internet infrastructure and arbitrary arrests for online activities. Fearful of aptitudes and capabilities of contemporary ICTs, dictatorial states, like Zimbabwe, have invented elusive and indirect ways of policing, and manipulating internet's openness. Internet access and use in rural areas is critical for providing the basis for active participation in human rights governance and democratization process in Zimbabwe. This is because (i) rural areas in Zimbabwe constitute the largest population percentage of the country's total population, (67.72% in 2016 according to the World Bank collection of development indicators) and (ii) a very few people in rural areas have access to internet (23.12% of the total country's population on internet).¹ Internet access in rural areas, therefore, should be provided as it adds value to freedom of opinion and expression as it amplifies the stifled voices of the rural citizen due to various reasons voice and multiplies the information within reach of everyone who possesses unlimited access to it.

In Zimbabwe, The government, since 1980, had initiatives on paper on the need for a vibrant information network inclusive of all people regardless of their dwellings. According to the then Minister of Information's 1990 report, "*The Zimbabwean government recognizes that no meaningful*

*development can take place unless the people have ready access to the media of information and communication such as newspapers, radio and television...."*²From abstract, there has been harmonization of ICT policies in Zimbabwe across rural and urban areas. Nevertheless, internet freedoms are constantly under threat as evidenced by (i) inadequate communication infrastructure particularly in rural areas, (ii) inadequate ICT facilities, (iii) inadequate financial resources in rural areas and others.

In Zimbabwe, internet access is relatively low as evidenced by very low participation of the rural populace in online political and socio-economic activism campaigns.³ Social movement protests against former president Robert Mugabe's government were purely organized through social media by the urban populace. For instance, social movements like #Tajamuka and #ThisFlag were initiated in Harare and have little or no participation from the rural areas. This sums up the rural – urban disconnection that exists when it comes to the enjoyment of internet freedoms.

As the country nears the 2018 harmonized elections, a lot of Zimbabweans have increasingly flocked to social media to share critical news and information and to express dissatisfaction with the government's failing policies and continued political economy deterioration regardless of the so-called *new dispensation*.⁴ Internet-based activism has grown massively in momentum on a myriad of political and socio-economic issues in the country. In July 2016, #ThisFlag social media

¹World Bank Report. 2016. Cited in Trading Economics: Zimbabwe – Rural Population: Available online at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/zimbabwe/rural-population-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html>. [Accessed: 28/02/2018].

²Chiyadzwa, F.I. 2014. Patterns of Social Media Usage amongst the marginalized rural Zimbabwean peasants: The case of Bikita. Available online on: <http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-ijhs/papers/Vol19-issue8/Version-2/1019826166.pdf>. [Accessed: 21/02/2018]

³ZDI-MC Focus Group Discussions, 27 February 2018.

⁴ZDI-MC Focus Group Discussions

movement launched online by Pastor Evan led to unprecedented anti-government protests that brought the country to a standstill. This followed the arbitrary arrest of Mawarire several times throughout the year for his calls for protest against abuse of human rights, corruption, government maladministration and other government ills. During the protests, WhatsApp became inaccessible for several hours on July 6, 2016, which was a clear indication of a government's deliberate move to cut off access to the popular mobile messaging app used by protestors to mobilize people from both rural and urban areas.

In the context of the described background, this study sought to examine the state or extent of internet freedom in rural communities of Zimbabwe and how internet freedoms are a challenge in rural areas. As a result, the study sought to scrutinize the extent to which entities and agencies responsible for promoting human rights and democracy have adopted internet (social media) use for the purpose of promoting democracy in Zimbabwe rural communities.

3. INTERNET FREEDOMS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: A CHALLENGE?

The internet and social media is deemed free courtesy of its apparent features including anonymous nature, decentralization and extensive coverage among others. In Zimbabwe, social media and the internet has brought some sigh of relief for the usually forgotten and stifled voices of the rural citizen. This is reiterated by the Freedom House report (2012) which posits that despite the restrictive environment for the traditional media in Zimbabwe, the internet and mobile phone usage is normally free from government interference⁵. However, Zimbabwe continues to stifle citizens' internet freedoms and it affects the rural population the most. Regardless of geographic location, citizens are supposed to enjoy their internet freedoms. These indications include the interference and implementation of strict media laws; there are also practical obstacles which might as well fall under the hands of the government. These include poor or lack of infrastructure⁶, high internet charges, internet blackout due to power cuts or no electricity at all among others. Citizens residing in rural areas have become serious victims of these obstacles as compared to those in urban areas. Poverty and lack of knowledge⁷ can also be added to the list.

Lack of infrastructure in rural areas

The government of Zimbabwe's position on Information Communication Technology (ICT) and communication has remained to be that all people should have access regardless

⁵See note 2.

⁶ See, Freedom House (2011). *Freedom on the net*. Available online at: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/Zimbabwe_FOTN2011.pdf

⁷Slama.K (2004). *Rural Culture is a diversity issue*. Available online at: <http://www.apa.org/practice/programs/rural/rural-culture.pdf>

of their geographical location. This points to the fact that internet penetration rate should be the same among people living in rural and urban areas. According to the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ), cited in Chiyadzwa (2014)⁸, the government plans to set up rural information centres and mobile van units, presumably to address the information gap and communication needs of the people. In spite of all these government's plans, the rural areas in Zimbabwe are still heavily affected by grave lack of information centres and mobile van units. According to Zimbabwe National Policy for ICT (2016), there has been significant roll out of communications infrastructure with 2G exceeding 75% population coverage, as at 31 December 2015. However, high speed broadband coverage is still patchy with most rural and remote areas remaining uncovered due to a non-holistic approach to universal service.⁹ Furthermore, broadband coverage in rural and remote areas remains low and the coverage is mainly concentrated in affluent urban areas like Harare, Bulawayo and Mutare. This is widening the urban-rural digital divide against the principle of equitable access. As such, the people in rural areas do not have access to mobile networks that would allow them to have internet access. As a result, they are denied of their right of access to information and online freedom of expression. In that regard, internet freedoms in rural areas are really a challenge.

Inadequate Commercial Electricity

In Zimbabwe, the rural areas are generally regarded as outmoded/traditional and culturally inert communities that are resistant to political, economic, cultural, and technological change.¹⁰ This resistance to

change is believed to go beyond the resistance to adopt and use electricity for various domestic uses. Nevertheless, the rural populace in the country has since adapted to the use of electricity but it is the government's lack of 'political will' that is causing such development of underdevelopment in rural areas in regard to electricity connection. The national power grid does not cover the whole country which leaves a significant rural population dependent on alternative power sources which tend to be more expensive. Even those who are on the national grid experience erratic supply. This shortage has had adverse effects on the development and use of ICTs especially in rural communities.¹¹ As a result, the enjoyment of internet freedoms in the rural areas is hindered.

Low digital literacy level

The government of Zimbabwe has successfully failed to incorporate digital technology in the country's education curriculum over the years. Therefore the level of digital literacy at grassroots level is very low to stimulate service uptake and usage, especially in rural areas.¹² Movements such #ThisFlag and #Tajamuka have used Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp to mobilize people against the continued economic deterioration in the year 2016. This has been mostly targeted at urban area citizens whose internet usage is high than their fellow counterparts residing in rural areas. This has left the rural populace sidelined from the enjoyment of internet freedoms where they cannot partake in urban-based advocacy campaigns.¹³ To that end, the internet freedoms are basically a challenge in the rural areas within the country Zimbabwe

⁸ See note 4

⁹ Zimbabwe National Policy for ICT. 2016. Available online at: http://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Zimbabwe%20National%20Policy%20for%20ICT%202016.pdf [Accessed: 27/02/2018]

¹⁰ Chiyadzwa, F.I. 2014. Patterns of Social Media Usage amongst the marginalized rural Zimbabwean peasants: The case of Bikita. Available online on: <http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr->

[jhss/papers/Vol19-issue8/Version-2/1019826166.pdf](http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol19-issue8/Version-2/1019826166.pdf). [Accessed: 21/02/2018]

¹¹ ZDI-MC Focus Group Discussions, February 2018

¹² See note 9

¹³ ZDI-MC Focus Group Discussions, February 2018

Poverty

Since early 1990s, Zimbabwe has been gripped by extreme poverty that has affected a large number of citizens especially those in rural areas. Rural poverty has increased to 76% in 2004 from 63% in 2013 as most rural households fail to produce enough food to meet their needs.¹⁴ The country has 72% of the country's population lives below the national poverty line or less than US\$1, 25 a day, while some 30% of the rural poor are considered to be "food poor" or "extremely poor."¹⁵ This is mainly attributed to the country being a low-income and food-deficit country, which was ranked 156 out of 187 countries by the 2013 UNDP Human Development Index (Ibid). Such poverty in rural areas of Zimbabwe has caused unprecedented levels of financial resource inadequacy. As a result, the populace cannot afford to buy internet bundles that are already costing exorbitant figures of money at the expense of their livelihoods issues. For instance, between June 2016 and May 2016, mobile data prices reportedly increased by 500 percent overnight in an apparent government effort to curtail access by making it unaffordable.¹⁶

The failure of government to deal with poverty for more than three decades now has caused the people of Zimbabwe, particularly the rural people, not to afford internet access for purposes of enjoying their online fundamental freedoms.

Lack of ICT Knowledge

Lack of knowledge has also contributed to rural communities not enjoying their internet rights. Given that some rural citizens can afford buying a smart phone, it is not everyone in communities who is literate.

According to Slama (2004), rural areas have high levels of illiteracy as they based themselves too much on culture and traditions whilst forgetting that we are living in a modern world that is comprised of technological, social and political aspects of life. Therefore, there is a need to embrace culture and traditions at the same time following issues affecting citizen's livelihoods.

¹⁴ The Zimbabwe Independent Newspaper, 12 September 2014.

¹⁵ World Food Program Report. 2014. Available online at: <http://publications.wfp.org/en/annual-report/2014/>. [Accessed: 28 February 2018]

¹⁶ Freedom House. Freedom on the Net. 2017. Available Online at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/zimbabwe>. [Accessed 1/03/2018].

4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Interception of Communications Act (ICA), 2007

The government of Zimbabwe has implemented various pieces of legislations aimed at stifling internet. This has affected the rural folks who already have very limited internet access. The government has considered monitoring emails and restricting internet sites for the purposes of 'national security' through the Interception of Communications Act of 2007¹⁷. Under such circumstances, the people of Zimbabwe including those in rural areas are left with no right to freedom of expression online and their privacy is being invaded by the responsible authorities mandated to protect the rights of the citizens.

POSA, 2002 & PTA, 2000

Public Order and Security Act, (2002)¹⁸, is also put in place to prohibit public gatherings which are said to bring 'alarm' and 'despondency' or are a threat to national security. This act was implemented to construe the infringement of freedom of expression and association in geographic spaces in Zimbabwe; however, it continues to haunt citizens' internet freedoms¹⁹. The Postal and Telecommunications Act, 2000, was also put in place to stifle internet freedoms by prohibiting the sending and receiving of messages which are seen as 'indecent', false or causing 'needless anxiety'. The act does not offer a fixed definition of these terms hence left at the mercy of subjection that can be easily manipulated at the expense of citizens' internet freedoms. These laws have led rural communities to

self-censorship; they do not enjoy their internet freedoms as there is no freedom after expression.

By and large, internet freedoms are a challenge in rural areas because of poor or no infrastructure to cater for internet access. The communities suffer lack of broadband as a result of lack of infrastructure²⁰. Some rural areas do not even have boosters for telephone networks hence cannot afford being connected to the internet. Lack of electricity in rural areas has also contributed to rural communities' backwardness in terms of internet access and usage. Given scenarios whereby telephone networks are made available, due to poverty some people residing in rural areas cannot afford to buy internet bundles and/or smart phones.

¹⁷ See, interception of Communications Act (2007), document available online at:

http://www.vertic.org/media/National%20Legislation/Zimbabwe/ZW_Interception_of_Communications_Act.pdf

¹⁸ See, POSA (2002). Available online at:

<http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/zimbabwe-POSA.pdf>

¹⁹ See, Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (2017). *Ordeals In 'The Long-Walk To Freedom' The State of Internet Governance in Zimbabwe*.

²⁰ See, National Broadband Map (2011). *Broadband Statistics Report*. Available online at:

<https://www.broadbandmap.gov/download/reports/national-broadband-map-broadband-availability-in-rural-vs-urban-areas.pdf>

5. EXTENT OF INTERNET FREEDOM IN RURAL COMMUNITIES OF ZIMBABWE

According to Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) 2017 3th report, mobile internet/data usage in Zimbabwe stood at 39.1% to record 4,129.4 Terabytes from 2,968.2 Terabytes recorded in the previous quarter²¹. Nevertheless, millions of Zimbabweans remain virtually disconnected due to poor network coverage in remote areas or the lack of affordable services. It is worthwhile to come to the realization that a significant urban-rural divide exists among Zimbabwean internet users due to fewer deployments of 3G and LTE in rural areas. POTRAZ report further reports that rural regions have only 4 of the 758 LTE base stations in the country which reflects how the rural citizens are largely cut off from the internet and thereby denied their internet freedoms.

Citizens, mainly in urban areas, have increasingly resorted to digital tools to engage in activism and mobilize for political and social issues in the past few years. This is evidenced by the establishment of urban-centered social movements such as #Tajamuka, #ThisGown, #SheVotes, #ThisFlag and others. In spite of the fact that rural populace is equally affected by government's negligence and mismanagement of the country, the formation of hash tag movements meant to spark online protests in rural areas has not been visible as it should be. #Tajamuka has tried to form an offshoot, #ZimbabweYadzoka which seeks to engage and mobilize the rural people and subsequently integrate them in urban-based online activism. However, the movement did not live up to its billing due to challenges in

internet access associated with the rural masses. This clearly points to the fact the digital activism is mainly an urban phenomenon yet Zimbabwe is largely rural.

Internet is increasingly emerging to be a very fundamental way whereby citizens can freely communicate and share their ideas. Consequently, it is fast becoming a progressively imperative device through which human rights defenders organize and clamor for political, socio-economic and institutional reform. Internet freedoms include sending and receiving information online without government restrictions, online freedom of expression, right to online privacy, and free speech online. However, the question that quickly comes to mind is; "Are rural communities well catered for in terms of internet freedoms?" In terms of sending and receiving information freely online, rural communities face a lot of challenges in a bid to enjoy online freedoms. This has been due to a number of factors highlighted elsewhere in this study. Self-censorship has been hampered by the implementation and interference of strict media laws. With the little knowledge on the so called repressive laws, rural communities are forced not to express their views on issues affecting their livelihoods²². For instance in November 2015, an MDC- T Councillor, Nduna Matshazi of Ward 18 in Bubi district was arrested and suspended for posting a message that 'denigrated' the former president Robert Mugabe on a Whatsapp group²³. This shows

²¹ See, POTRAZ govt reports (2017) Available at: http://www.potraz.gov.zw/images/documents/3rd_Quarter_2017.pdf

²² See, Research Gate (2012). *Communities real and imagined are designing a communication system for Zimbabwean activists.* [/www.researchgate.net/publication/221144132_Communities_real_and_imagined_designing_a_communication_system_for_zimbabwean_activists](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/221144132_Communities_real_and_imagined_designing_a_communication_system_for_zimbabwean_activists)

²³ See, The Zimbabwe Daily (2015). A Councillor suspended for insulting Mugabe Available online at:

that the government of Zimbabwe restricts freedom of expression; hence it becomes difficult for people in rural areas to communicate effectively and freely express themselves due to fear.

6. HOW CHALLENGES TO INTERNET FREEDOMS AFFECT RIGHT TO ACCESS TO INFORMATION, INFORMATION SHARING AND FREE EXPRESSION

Following the government of Zimbabwe's realization of the power that internet has in influencing policy change, it resorted to banning and blocking sources of information, internet and social blackouts, increasing data costs among others.

Blocking and Filtering

On 6 July 2016, Whatsapp became completely inaccessible for nearly 5 hours during anti-government protests led by #ThisFlag movement. This led to strong suspicion of government's interference given the platform's widespread usage by citizens to organize the protests. The government of Zimbabwe distanced itself from the mishap. However, impeccable sources in the telecommunications sector established that the government instructed network service providers to shut down internet particularly Whatsapp. The government shut down the platform in fear that the rural populace would have access to information pertaining to protests and probably add their voice. The

<https://www.thezimbabwedaily.com/news/42214-councillor-suspended-for-insulting-mugabe.html>

Whatsapp outage followed months of outrageous threats made by government officials to restrict and control social media, including former President Mugabe who stated in early 2016 that his government would engage the Chinese government for assistance with filtering the internet and blocking social media.²⁴

Inadequate Communications Infrastructure

The rural areas in Zimbabwe are evidently associated with lack of adequate and effective information and communications infrastructure in form of mobile network service providers and ICT facilities. As such, the rural people do not have reliable internet access due to broadband coverage being extremely low. Therefore, the use of internet by rural populace for purposes of accessing information pertaining to governance matters becomes very difficult.

Lack of Knowledge and ICT Skills

Lack of knowledge has also contributed to people in rural areas being not able to enjoy their online freedoms. Most Zimbabwean citizens residing in rural areas are technologically backward when it comes to using internet exercising and promoting their human rights.²⁵ In some rural areas in Zimbabwe, it took them some days or even weeks to access information that Robert Mugabe was removed from power. Lack of knowledge is also a barrier to the enjoyment of internet freedoms.

Government's Control over ICT

The government of Zimbabwe has increased its ICT market share and control over the

²⁴ Kabweza, M. 2016. Chinese style internet censorship coming to Zimbabwe – President Mugabe. Available online at: <http://www.techzim.co.zw/2016/04/china-style-internet-censorship-coming-to-zimbabwe-president-mugabe/>. [Accessed: 28/02/2018]

²⁵ ZDI-MC Focus Group Discussion, February 2018

international gateways in its acquisition of mobile provider Telecel.²⁶ The government has perennially been accused of actively undermining the operations of privately-owned telecom, Econet. Whatsapp was not accessible for a number of hours on 6 July 2016 when #ThisFlag social movement conducted its countrywide anti-government protest. During that day, the rural communities and everyone else in urban areas were deprived of their right of access to information, freedom of speech and information sharing concerning the protests which were ongoing. Shortly after, mobile data prices were increased by 500 percent overnight in an apparent effort to curtail access by making it unaffordable. A former director in the intelligence services was appointed director-general of the regulator POTRAZ in October 2016, which citizens believed to have been part of the government's plans to monitor and restrict online activities.

7. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that, the country's political, legal and socio-economic environment is currently a challenge to the enjoyment of internet freedoms by the people residing in rural areas. Enjoyment of these rights is restricted and defied by the system of governance that is currently in place. The online protests resembling freedom of expression in country's urban areas are being organized through social media that few people have access to in rural areas. Most rural communities in Zimbabwe are geographically secluded and economically disadvantaged and have consequently failed to attract the interest of internet service providers. As a result, most rural people find

it difficult to have access to online channels to freely express themselves and have access to information pertaining to their human rights and governance matters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance free exercise of internet freedoms in rural communities under the current political, legal and socio-economic environment in the country, this study recommends the following to key stakeholders:

GOVERNMENT

- ✓ Should expedite the process of constructing adequate and effective information and communication infrastructure in rural areas. This will ensure high speed broadband coverage being extended to rural areas for convenient access to internet.
- ✓ Should encourage the private sector to foster access to and increased use of telecommunications/ICT in rural areas to increase internet usage in such communities.
- ✓ Should roll out ICT programmes in rural areas meant to impart ICT skills in people living there. This is because rural areas have shortage of skills needed for ICT. This shortage has a knock-on digital literacy which drives uptake and usage of ICT services. There is need to integrate ICTs in the education curricula commencing from early childhood education level as well as promote ICTs uptake within rural communities.

CIVIL SOCIETY & HUMAN RIGHTS

DEFENDERS

- ✓ Should lobby for an internet governance framework to deal with the management of national and international internet traffic both in rural and urban areas.
- ✓ Should go to rural communities and raise awareness on internet freedoms through creation of social media sensitization forums, conducting civic education forums at grassroots level and conducting road shows. The rural people need to be

²⁶Freedom House. 2017. Freedom On the Net. Available Online at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/zimbabwe>. [Accessed: 28/02/2018].

made aware of their internet freedoms in order to eliminate ignorance in regard to internet freedoms.

- ✓ Should create dense networking systems using modern ICTs through which to share ideas, skills and disseminate information and establish lasting solutions to internet freedom challenges in rural areas.

PRIVATE SECTOR

- ✓ Should bridge the digital divide and provide broadband for all through establishing effecting and adequate information and communication infrastructure in rural areas.
- ✓ Should collaborate with the government and civil society to find best lasting solutions on protecting and promoting internet freedoms in rural areas.

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