



Ghanaian government & civil society develop new cybersecurity policy & strategy together



Cyber security is a pivotal topic for countries worldwide and an important concern is digital online rights.

A wide range of civil society representatives were able to voice their opinions on the new strategy.

CHOGM THEME

A more secure future

PROJECT TITLE

Commonwealth Cyber Security Programme

COUNTRY

Ghana

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

Global Partners Digital

This was reflected in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2018, where member states agreed to the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration that recognised the potential for a free, open, inclusive and secure cyberspace. The Declaration affirmed that the rights citizens have offline, must also be protected online.

To help member states follow through on that commitment, the Commonwealth 18–20 Fund’s CyberSecurity Programme supported the involvement of civil society groups in Ghana’s cyber security policymaking. Global Partners Digital is a social purpose company dedicated to fostering a digital environment underpinned by human rights and democratic values. They worked with two Ghanaian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to set up a series of workshops bringing together stakeholders from civil

society and government. These workshops were an opportunity for the government to share drafts of their upcoming cyber security strategy and for civil society organisations to give their constructive feedback.

Value of cyber security

As a result of these workshops, many Ghanaian human rights organisations are now much more focused on how cyber security relates to human rights. “Even though their work is not ‘online’, there are important implications as human rights are online too,” explained Vivian Affoah, from the Media Foundation for West Africa. “Before the workshops, many charities hadn’t really thought it through, but afterwards they were all very interested and wanted much more involvement.”



Vivian Affoah delivering Media Freedom West Africa's input on the government's draft strategy, October 2019.

Amnesty International, a global charity that focuses on human rights, provides a clear example of how civil society organisations have become more engaged. "We had no prior experience with government on cyber security," said Robert Amofo, Amnesty International's Ghana Country Director. "So we saw the workshops as an important opportunity to engage us as human rights defenders allowing us to become part of this process."

'They were very welcoming and very receptive'

Vivian Affoah

The workshops also supported Amnesty's new global strategy, which has a component on online freedom of expression.

Committed to participation

For the government, engaging with civil society on cyber security was also new. "The workshops were an opportunity for all kinds of stakeholders to input into the process in an open meeting, and for me this was a novel experience," explained Owusu Bediako-Poku, who works for the government on cyber security policy. "The willingness of civil society to engage in a document in a very detailed way was very instructive for me." Other stakeholders also praised the government for their approach to open consultation. "They were very welcoming and very receptive," Vivian said. "The government is now recognising NGOs as being key stakeholders in developing

cyber security strategies that protect human rights."

Moreover, Owusu said this process had made him realise the wider importance of having a process of consultation with a wide cross-section of society. "For me, this exercise demonstrated that engagement is necessary for policies with national level implications. It is critical to get everyone on board, so that when we go to implementation, we are all on the same page." These views from the Ghanaian Government are an excellent indicator of the sustainability of this Commonwealth Cyber Security programme, suggesting

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that the government and civil society will continue to engage after the programme ends.

Tangible policy outcomes

Perhaps most importantly, the collaboration between civil society and the Ghanaian government has led to significant changes in the revised draft of their new national cyber security strategy. The government has accepted proposed changes on how they define vulnerable people. They also added in a new component on Child Online Protection as a result of feedback from the charity Child Online Africa. The government's response not only ensures that the protection of human rights remains front and centre of Ghana's new strategy, it also demonstrates mutual trust, which is invaluable.



Ghana's Deputy Minister of Communications Vincent Sowah Odotei speaks at the stakeholder validation workshop, held during activities for Ghana's National Cyber Security Awareness Month in Accra, Ghana in October 2019.