

DIGITAL RIGHTS AWARENESS IN UGANDA'S BUSINESS SECTOR

RESEARCH REPORT SEPTEMBER 2025

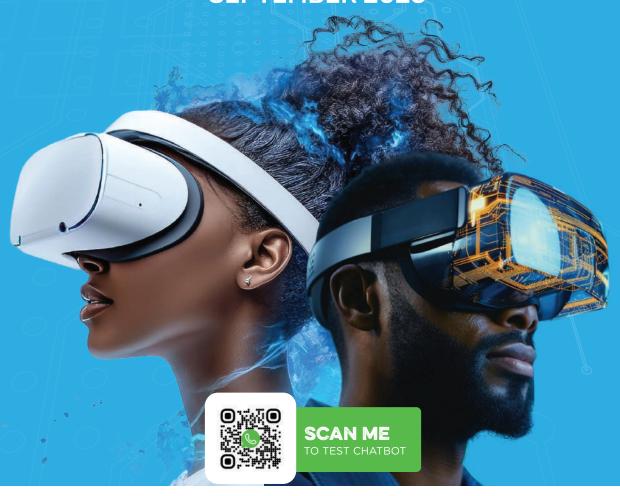










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Background

Uganda's digital economy is rapidly evolving, driven by increased internet penetration, mobile adoption, and the integration of digital tools into commerce, finance, and governance. However, alongside this growth are significant challenges around digital rights awareness, data protection, cybersecurity, and equitable access. For businesses—especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which constitute over 90% of Uganda's private sector—the ability to adopt digital tools securely and responsibly has direct implications for competitiveness, consumer trust, and compliance with the Data Protection and Privacy Act (2019).

This project highlights the growing reliance on digital technologies which raises challenges around data privacy, cybersecurity, and freedom of expression, particularly where infrastructural and educational barriers exist. The Government of Uganda's Digital Transformation Roadmap (2021-2025) outlines ambitious targets, including; expanding broadband coverage to 95% of the population, reducing the digital usage gap by promoting affordable devices and digital skills for rural and underserved areas, scaling up digital government services, with a focus on business-facing e-services (licensing, taxation, procurement), promoting digital skilling and inclusion, especially for women, youth, and persons with disabilities, and strengthening data protection and cybersecurity frameworks, building on the DPPA (2019).

Digital rights awareness has become central in global discussions around privacy, cybersecurity, and economic development. In Uganda, more citizens are using mobile money, engaging in e-commerce, and adopting cloud-based services, leading to greater exposure to cyber risks and rights violations.

Uganda's Digital Snapshot



Mobile
Penetration
Mobile subscriptions
(UCC 2023).



of Ugandans own a mobile phone (urban: 46%, rural: 41%).



14.2M

Internet Users projected in 2025 (28% penetration).

2.4M Social Media Accounts

(62% male, 38% female)



Uganda's Digital Environment and the Nature of Business Enterprises

Uganda's digital landscape has expanded significantly over the last decade, driven by mobile technology adoption, improved internet connectivity, and a growing emphasis on digital literacy and e-government services. As of 2023-2025, the country has **34.3 million** mobile subscriptions, representing roughly 88% penetration, and 14.2 million internet users (~28% of the population). The majority of devices are still feature phones, but smartphone adoption is increasing, enabling more advanced digital applications, including mobile money, social media marketing, and online business management. Broadband infrastructure has expanded, with over 30,000 kilometers of fiber optic networks, though rural areas remain underserved. Initiatives such as UCUSAF digital literacy programs have reached thousands of SMEs, women, and farmers, while assistive technology programs have enabled inclusion for schools for the deaf and blind.

This digital transformation is occurring alongside Uganda's diverse and predominantly small-scale business landscape. SMEs make up over 90% of Uganda's private sector, with the majority operating in the informal economy, particularly in retail, agriculture, manufacturing, and services. Most businesses are micro-enterprises with fewer than 10 employees, and only a small proportion have formal registration. Many lack structured operations, digital skills, or awareness of legal and regulatory obligations, including those related to data protection and cybersecurity. Access to formal financial services is limited, and many businesses rely on cash transactions and informal bookkeeping.

The intersection of the digital environment and business enterprises presents both **opportunities** and challenges:

Opportunities:



Digital Tools for Growth: SMEs can leverage mobile money, e-commerce platforms, and social media marketing to expand market reach and improve operational efficiency.



Data and Analytics: Increasing digital adoption allows businesses to collect and analyze customer and operational data, enabling informed decision-making.



Access to Information and Services: E-government platforms offer opportunities for easier business registration, tax compliance, and access to government programs.

Challenges:



Digital Skills Gap: Many SME owners lack digital literacy, limiting their ability to effectively adopt digital tools.



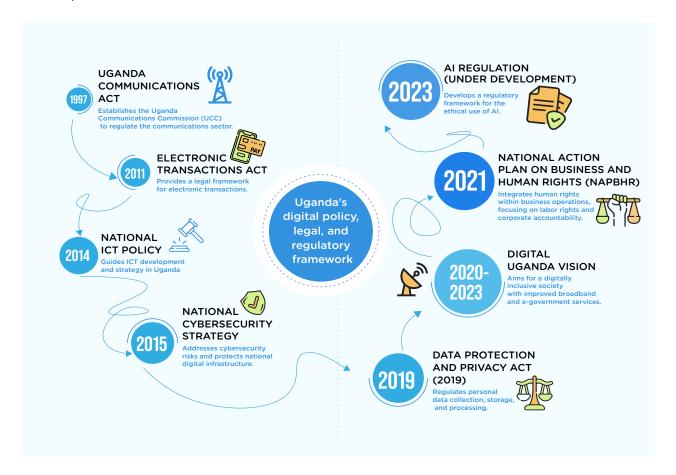
Cybersecurity Risks: Limited awareness and weak practices expose businesses to data breaches, fraud, and operational disruption.



Infrastructure and Inclusion Gaps: Rural enterprises face connectivity constraints, low internet penetration, and high data costs, restricting their ability to participate fully in the digital economy.

Uganda's digital policy, legal, and regulatory framework

Uganda's digital landscape is guided by a robust and evolving policy and regulatory framework that aims to foster digital transformation, economic development, and the protection of human rights in the digital space. This framework encompasses a variety of policies, legal instruments, and strategies that aim to promote the growth of the ICT sector, while addressing the challenges and opportunities of the digital economy.



Quick Facts: State of Uganda's Digital Environment

Mobile Subscriptions

34.3 million mobile subscriptions (88% penetration, 3% QoQ growth)

Internet Users

14.2 million

internet users (28% penetration) by 2025, up 7.8% from 2024

Mobile Devices

21% of devices are smartphones, 49% drop in basic handset use

Fiber Optic Network

Fiber optic network expanded from 5,700 km in 2013 to 30,161 km in 2023

Mobile Ownership

43% of the population owns a mobile phone, urban areas at 46%, rural areas at 41%

SOURCE: UCC Market Report (2023), ICT Sector at a Glance (2023),

Social Media Adoption

2.4 million active social media accounts, 62% male and 38% female

Telecom Towers

Telecom towers increased from 3,208 in 2013 to 4,907 in 2023

Fixed Broadband

Fixed broadband remains niche but expanding into underserved areas

Data Costs

1GB of data costs UGX 5,000 in 2023, down from UGX 45,000 in 2008

Assistive Technology

Three schools for the deaf and blind received assistive technology

Cyber Hygiene Practices

High cyber hygiene awareness among corporates, low among SMEs

SOURCE: UCC Market Report (2023), Digital Transformation Roadmap (2021-2025)

SOURCE: UCC Annual

Digital Literacy Programs

7,500 SMEs, **5,800** women, **11,800** farmers, and 500 elderly people trained

SOURCE: ICT Sector Development Reports (2023)

Women's Digital Access

22% of rural women own mobile phones, 71% never used the internet

SOURCE: Unwanted Witness Uganda, CIPESA Reports (2023)

Cybersecurity Risks

Increasing
cybercrime
incidents,
particularly in
mobile money
and e-commerce

Rural vs Urban Divide in Internet Usage

Internet usage among children: 68% in urban areas vs. 22% in rural areas

Digital Transformation Roadmap (2021-2025)

Broadband
expansion, digital
government
services, skills
training, and
cybersecurity as
key pillars

SOURCE: Digital Transformation Roadmap (2021-2025)

UCUSAF Initiatives

Initiatives to enhance rural broadband access and improve digital inclusion

SOURCE: UCUSAF (2023)

Regional Internet Coverage

Buganda (59% mobile ownership) and Ankole (48%) have high internet usage; Karamoja

(20%) and Teso

lag behind

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

Private sector and telecom providers need to collaborate for affordable digital access

Internet Access
Cost in Rural Areas

Rural internet access cost is

25% higher than in urban areas due to infrastructure gaps

> SOURCE: UCC Market Report (2023)

Methodology

This **methodology** outlines the research approach and data sources used to assess **digital rights awareness** across businesses in Uganda. It incorporates a comprehensive analysis framework, including the **scorecard system**, to evaluate current practices and identify gaps that need to be addressed in the future.

This analysis adopts a **descriptive research design** to assess the state of **digital rights awareness** within Uganda's business sector. Given the challenges posed by limited primary data collection resources, the research relies heavily on **secondary data** obtained from various studies, reports, and surveys that have been conducted by both local and international organizations. This methodology aims to provide a clear and comprehensive understanding of how well businesses in Uganda are informed about and implement practices related to **digital rights**, **cybersecurity**, **data protection**, and **ethical digital conduct**.

The data utilized in this analysis was sourced primarily from a range of **published reports** and **surveys** by reputable organizations including **Unwanted Witness Uganda**, **CIPESA**, and **Uganda Communications Commission (UCC)**, among others. The sources were selected based on their relevance to **digital rights**, **SME digital practices**, **cybersecurity**, and **business human rights** in Uganda.

The research draws on the findings of **Unwanted Witness Uganda**, which investigates the level of **digital rights awareness** among citizens and businesses. It also references reports by **CIPESA** on **digital responsibility** and **cybersecurity awareness** among SMEs, highlighting the challenges businesses face in securing their digital assets and complying with data protection regulations. Additional data from the **Uganda Communications Commission (UCC)** and the **National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAPBHR)** have been used to identify key legal frameworks and regulatory measures that guide the **digital economy** and **business rights** in Uganda.

To analyze the data, the research employs a qualitative approach, focusing on key indicators such as digital rights knowledge, the adoption of data protection measures, cybersecurity practices, and the availability of training and capacity-building programs for businesses. These indicators were chosen based on their relevance to understanding the digital rights landscape in Uganda, especially among SMEs, which form a significant portion of the Ugandan economy.







The methodology includes the use of a **scorecard system** to evaluate the level of **digital rights awareness** across businesses in Uganda. The scorecard assesses **eight key indicators**, with each indicator being scored on a **1-5 scale** based on findings from the secondary data sources. The scoring system provides a way to quantitatively measure the current state of **digital rights awareness** in Uganda's business sector. A score of **1-2** indicates **low awareness/implementation**, and **4-5** indicates **moderate awareness/implementation**. This scoring system helps to clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses in **digital rights** implementation and awareness within businesses, which can guide future policy recommendations.

Although this methodology relies on existing data, several limitations exist. **Data gaps** are present, particularly regarding **SME-specific practices** and the state of **cybersecurity awareness** in smaller enterprises. Some of the reports are also **regionally aggregated**, which may overlook **local disparities** in **digital rights** awareness and implementation across different parts of Uganda. Additionally, given the **rapid growth** of Uganda's **digital ecosystem**, some of the data may be outdated as the landscape continues to evolve rapidly. However, despite these limitations, the secondary data provides a **solid foundation** for the analysis.

Ultimately, this research seeks to provide a **comprehensive evaluation** of **digital rights awareness** in Uganda's business sector. The findings will contribute to identifying key areas for **improvement** in **data protection**, **cybersecurity**, and **digital rights education**. By leveraging the scorecard and recommendations drawn from this analysis, **policy development**, **business practices**, and **capacity-building programs** can be designed to promote **digital rights** across Uganda's business sector, particularly among **SMEs**, enabling them to operate **securely**, **ethically**, and **responsibly** in the digital economy.

Key Indicators of Digital Rights Awareness

Indicators of digital rights awareness among businesses in Uganda are crucial for understanding how well enterprises respect and uphold digital rights in their operations. These indicators reflect the extent to which businesses are informed about and implement practices related to digital rights, including data privacy, cybersecurity, and ethical digital conduct. They provide a comprehensive overview of the state of digital rights awareness among businesses in Uganda.

Knowledge of Digital Rights Principles

Definition: The extent to which business owners and employees are aware of fundamental digital rights, such as the right to privacy, data protection, and freedom of expression online.

Findings: A study by Unwanted Witness Uganda revealed that approximately 49% of citizens are aware of digital rights, with awareness levels varying by region, gender, and education level.

Implementation of Data Protection Measures

Definition: The adoption of policies and practices that safeguard customer and employee data, ensuring compliance with data protection laws.

Findings: Many SMEs in Uganda lack comprehensive data protection strategies, often due to limited understanding of data privacy requirements and resource constraints.

Cybersecurity Awareness and Practices

Definition: The level of awareness and implementation of cybersecurity measures to protect digital assets and information systems.

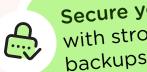
Findings: A systematic review highlighted that SMEs often face challenges in achieving cybersecurity resilience due to a lack of awareness, limited literacy, and constrained financial resources.

Training and Capacity Building

KNOW DIGITAL









Report and dig threats

YOUR RIGHTS

n<mark>ed</mark> W your sed

O to essary **quests**

our business ng passwords, & safe devices

fraud ital **Definition**: The provision of training programs to enhance employees' understanding and skills related to digital rights and ethical digital practices.

Findings: According to Unwanted Witness Uganda, a significant number of respondents have not received formal training in digital rights, indicating a gap in capacity building efforts.

Integration of Digital Rights into Business Policies

Definition: The incorporation of digital rights considerations into business policies, ensuring that operations align with ethical standards and legal requirements.

Findings: The ARBHR project, co-implemented by CIPESA, aims to equip businesses with knowledge and tools to integrate digital rights into their policies and practices, promoting responsible digital conduct.

Public Engagement and Advocacy

Definition: The involvement of businesses in public discussions and initiatives aimed at promoting digital rights and ethical digital practices.

Findings: CIPESA's #BeeraSharp campaign seeks to address knowledge gaps among Ugandan businesses regarding digital rights, encouraging ethical digital practices and corporate responsibility.

Access to Legal and Regulatory Information

Definition: The availability and accessibility of information regarding digital rights laws and regulations for businesses.

Findings: The Unwanted Witness Uganda study found that many respondents are unaware of internet governance systems in Uganda, highlighting the need for better dissemination of legal information.

Gender and Inclusion in Digital Practices

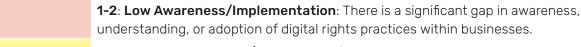
Definition: The extent to which businesses promote gender equality and inclusivity in their digital operations and policies.

Findings: The ARBHR project emphasizes the importance of including women and marginalized communities in digital development, addressing the gender gap in digital access and participation.

Performance Scorecard for Digital Rights Awareness Across Businesses in Uganda

We adopted the scorecard analysis to evaluates the level of **digital rights awareness** across businesses in Uganda, based on the eight awareness indicators highlighted by the study. The scorecard assigns a **score** for each indicator, reflecting the current status of awareness and practices in the country.

The performance scores have been made on a 1-5 scale with the interpretation below:



3: **Moderate Awareness/Implementation**: Businesses have made some progress, but further improvement is needed to fully integrate digital rights.

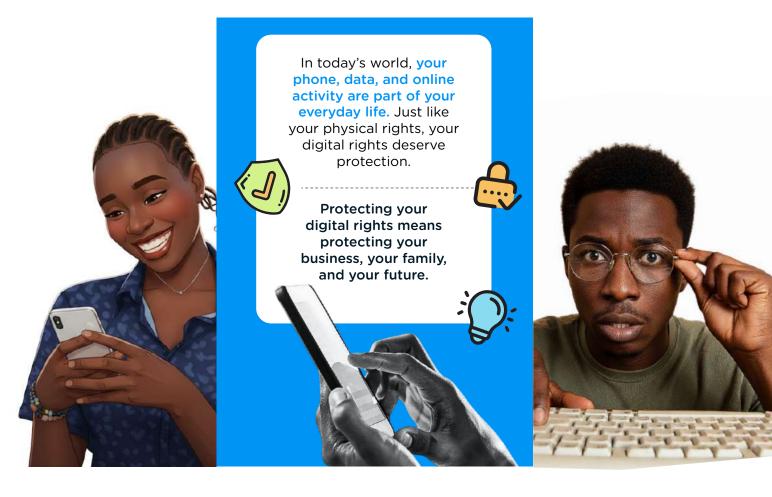
4-5: High Awareness/Implementation: Businesses are fully aware of digital rights and have integrated these practices into their policies and operations.

Indicator	Description	Score (1-5)	Rationale
Knowledge of Digital Rights Principles	The extent to which business owners and employees are aware of fundamental digital rights.	2	Awareness of digital rights is generally low (49% of citizens aware), with significant regional and gender gaps.
Implementation of Data Protection Measures	The adoption of policies and practices that safeguard customer and employee data.	2	Many SMEs lack comprehensive data protection strategies, often due to limited understanding and resources.
Cybersecurity Awareness and Practices	The level of awareness and implementation of cybersecurity measures to protect digital assets.	2	SMEs face high cybersecurity risks but weak preparedness due to limited knowledge and weak security measures.
Training and Capacity Building	The provision of training programs to enhance employees' understanding and skills related to digital rights.	1	Formal training programs on digital rights are limited, indicating a significant gap in capacity building.
Integration of Digital Rights into Business Policies	The incorporation of digital rights considerations into business policies and operations.	2	Businesses are starting to integrate digital rights, but progress is slow, and many still lack structured policies.

Public Engagement and Advocacy	The involvement of businesses in public discussions on promoting digital rights and ethical practices.	3	There are initiatives like CIPESA's #BeeraSharp campaign addressing knowledge gaps and engaging businesses.
Access to Legal and Regulatory Information	The availability and accessibility of information on digital rights laws and regulations.	2	Businesses often lack awareness of regulatory frameworks, and there is limited dissemination of legal information.
Gender and Inclusion in Digital Practices	The extent to which businesses promote gender equality and inclusivity in their digital operations.	3	Efforts are being made to include women and marginalized groups in digital development, though challenges remain.

The total score of 16/40 for digital rights awareness across businesses in Uganda reveals a moderate level of awareness and implementation, with key gaps in training, cybersecurity, and data protection practices. While there are positive steps towards awareness, especially in the areas of advocacy and gender inclusion, businesses in Uganda—particularly SMEs—face considerable challenges in fully integrating digital rights into their operations.

There is a critical need for **policy interventions**, **capacity building**, and **public-private partnerships** to promote **digital rights** and **cybersecurity practices**. By addressing these gaps, Uganda can create a more **responsible** and **inclusive** digital economy that protects the rights of both businesses and consumers, ensuring sustainable growth in the digital era.



Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis from the **scorecard**, which revealed significant gaps in **digital rights awareness**, **data protection**, and **cybersecurity** practices, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance **digital rights awareness** across businesses in Uganda. These recommendations are aligned with the interventions discussed in this study and aim to address the gaps identified in the scorecard:



1. Strengthen Digital Rights Training and Capacity Building Programs

The scorecard results revealed a low score (1) for **training and capacity building**, which indicates a significant gap in formal education regarding **digital rights** and **cybersecurity** within Uganda's business sector. To address this, we recommend the following:

Government and Private Sector Collaboration: Collaboration between the government, Civil Society, and private sector to launch comprehensive training programs that target business owners, managers, and employees. These programs should focus on the importance of digital rights, data protection, and cybersecurity practices.

Targeted Workshops and E-Learning: Organize workshops, webinars, and **e-learning platforms** that provide accessible and affordable **digital rights** training, focusing particularly on **SMEs** in rural areas.

Incorporate Digital Rights Education in Business Curricula: Work with business associations and vocational training institutions to integrate digital rights education into their curricula, ensuring that future entrepreneurs are well-versed in ethical digital practices.



2. Promote the Adoption of Data Protection Policies

The **scorecard score of 2** for **data protection measures** suggests that many businesses lack robust **data protection strategies**. To improve this, we recommend the following actions:

Policy Development and Implementation: Encourage businesses to adopt data protection policies that align with the Data Protection and Privacy Act (2019). These policies should cover data collection, storage, processing, and sharing to ensure customer privacy is respected.

Capacity Building for SMEs: Provide SMEs with resources and guidelines to develop basic data protection policies, with support from data protection experts and regulatory bodies like the Personal Data Protection (PDPO).

Incentives for Compliance: Offer incentives such as **tax breaks**, **recognition**, or **grants** to businesses that implement **compliant data protection** frameworks, especially **SMEs** that are most likely to struggle with compliance.

3. Enhance Cybersecurity Awareness and Practices

With the **scorecard score of 2** indicating low **cybersecurity awareness** and **practices**, businesses are vulnerable to cyber attacks, data breaches, and fraud. The following interventions are recommended:



National Cybersecurity Campaign: Launch a nationwide cybersecurity awareness campaign aimed at educating businesses on the importance of securing digital assets. This campaign could be implemented in partnership with the National Cybersecurity Strategy, NITA-U, and cybersecurity experts.

Cybersecurity Training for SMEs: Offer affordable cybersecurity training and toolkits tailored for SMEs. This training should cover basic cybersecurity measures, including password security, data encryption, and safe online practices.

Cybersecurity Infrastructure Support: Provide **subsidies** or **loans** for businesses, particularly **SMEs**, to acquire necessary **cybersecurity tools** and software, making cybersecurity more accessible to businesses with limited resources.

4. Incorporate Digital Rights into Business Policies

The **low score (2)** for **integration of digital rights** into business policies suggests that many businesses do not have structured policies related to **digital rights**. To address this gap, we recommend the following:



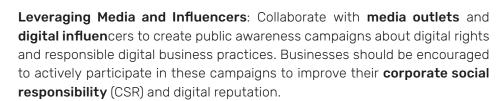
Mandate Digital Rights Integration: The government could introduce regulations requiring businesses to formally integrate digital rights (including data privacy, cybersecurity, and online freedom) into their corporate governance frameworks.

Encourage Best Practice Adoption: Provide **best practice guidelines** for integrating **digital rights** into business policies, ensuring that businesses adopt **ethical** and **secure** digital practices in line with **international standards**.

Public-Private Partnerships for Policy Development: Facilitate the development of **digital rights policies** through **collaborations between government agencies**, **business associations**, and **civil society organizations**.

5. Promote Public Engagement and Advocacy on Digital Rights

While the **scorecard** indicated moderate participation in **public advocacy** (score of 3), there is still considerable room for improvement. To foster greater engagement, we recommend:





Industry-wide Digital Rights Forums: Organize national forums and conferences where businesses can exchange ideas and discuss digital rights issues. These forums could involve key stakeholders, such as government representatives, tech experts, business leaders, and human rights advocates.

6. Improve Access to Legal and Regulatory Information

The scorecard score of 2 for access to legal and regulatory information indicates that many businesses lack access to up-to-date information on digital rights laws and compliance requirements. To improve this, we recommend the following:



Create a Digital Rights Resource Center: Establish a centralized **resource hub** where businesses can access information on **data protection laws**, **cybersecurity regulations**, and **digital rights**. This could be managed by agencies like **NITA-U** and **PDPO** and could provide **free resources**, **webinars**, and **guides**.

Improve Legal Literacy: Conduct **training sessions** for businesses to enhance their understanding of **digital rights laws**, particularly for **SMEs** and **informal businesses**. This would ensure that business owners understand their **legal obligations** in a **digitally connected economy**.

7. Address Gender and Inclusion Gaps in the Digital Economy

Although the **scorecard** shows a **moderate score (3)** in promoting **gender equality** and **inclusivity**, challenges persist, especially for women in **rural areas**. To further address these gaps, we recommend:



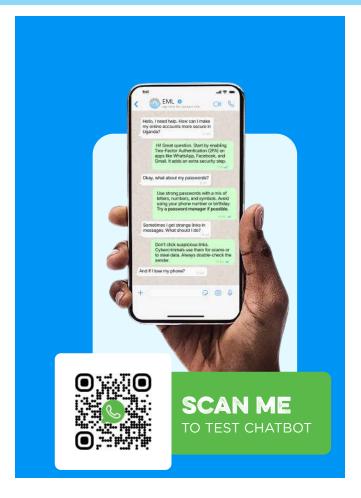
Inclusive Digital Skills Training: Design **targeted training programs** for **women entrepreneurs**, **youth**, and **marginalized communities** to promote their participation in Uganda's growing **digital economy**.

Empower Women in Digital Leadership: Encourage **women-led businesses** to participate in **digital rights advocacy**, and support their access to **digital tools** and **financial services** through **gender-focused initiatives**.

Conclusion

The analysis of digital rights awareness across businesses in Uganda, based on the **scorecard results**, has highlighted significant gaps and opportunities for improvement. While some progress has been made, particularly in areas such as **public engagement** and **gender inclusion**, key areas such as **cybersecurity**, **data protection**, and **digital rights training** remain underdeveloped. These gaps underscore the need for a targeted, comprehensive approach to enhance **digital rights awareness** across Uganda's business sector.

To address these challenges, this project proposes several **strategic interventions** that align with the recommendations above, providing actionable solutions that will significantly improve **digital rights literacy** among business owners, managers, and employees. The activities outlined for the project's implementation period will focus on **education**, **capacity building**, **policy integration**, and **public engagement**. These initiatives were designed to create a **sustainable shift** in how businesses understand and implement **digital rights** in their operations.



Research and digital rights awareness project integration

The analysis of **digital rights awareness** across Uganda's business sector reveals significant gaps in **cybersecurity**, **data protection**, and **digital rights education**, particularly among **SMEs** and informal businesses. Despite some positive strides in areas like **public engagement** and **gender inclusion**, the overall level of awareness remains low, with key practices such as **data protection** and **cybersecurity** often overlooked. This underscores the need for targeted, practical interventions to raise awareness and implement digital rights principles across businesses in Uganda.

To address these gaps, this project will undertake several **strategic activities** aimed at improving **digital rights literacy** and **cybersecurity** practices, focusing on **education**, **capacity building**, and **public engagement**:

AI-Powered Chatbot: A key innovation in this project is the development of an **AI-powered chatbot** designed to provide businesses with on-demand information and guidance on **digital rights**, **data protection**, and **cybersecurity**. This accessible tool will allow businesses, particularly those in **remote areas**, to engage with digital rights content in real-time and integrate best practices into their operations.

Social Media Awareness Campaign: An **extensive social media campaign** will engage Uganda's business community, leveraging **Facebook**, **WhatsApp**, and **X (formerly Twitter)** to disseminate key information on **digital rights** and **cybersecurity**. This campaign will utilize **targeted ads** and **informative content** to raise awareness and drive engagement, especially among **SMEs** who often lack formal training on these issues.

Visual Animations in Business Areas: Engaging visual animations will be displayed across digital screens in high-traffic business hubs such as markets, shopping centers, and business districts. These animations will visually communicate digital rights principles, the importance of data protection, and best practices for cybersecurity, reaching a wide audience and ensuring that businesses absorb this critical information as part of their daily routine.

By aligning these activities with the **recommendations** for **digital rights training**, **data protection**, and **cybersecurity** awareness, the project aims to create a comprehensive and **scalable approach** to improving **digital rights** across Uganda's business sector. The chatbot, social media campaign, and visual animations will collectively enhance **digital rights literacy**, **boost cybersecurity measures**, and ensure that businesses understand their **legal obligations** under **Uganda's Data Protection and Privacy Act (2019)**.

In conclusion, the interventions proposed in this project are designed to address the key findings from the **scorecard**, providing practical solutions to improve **digital rights awareness** and **cybersecurity** practices among Ugandan businesses. By leveraging **AI** and **digital platforms**, the project aims to create **lasting change**, enabling businesses to operate more **securely**, **ethically**, and **responsibly** in the digital economy. This approach will not only enhance **business operations** but also contribute to building a **more secure**, **inclusive**, **and sustainable** digital environment for all stakeholders in Uganda.

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