



# Newsletter | May 2026 Quarterly Round-Up: Open Calls, Peer Learning & Regional Momentum

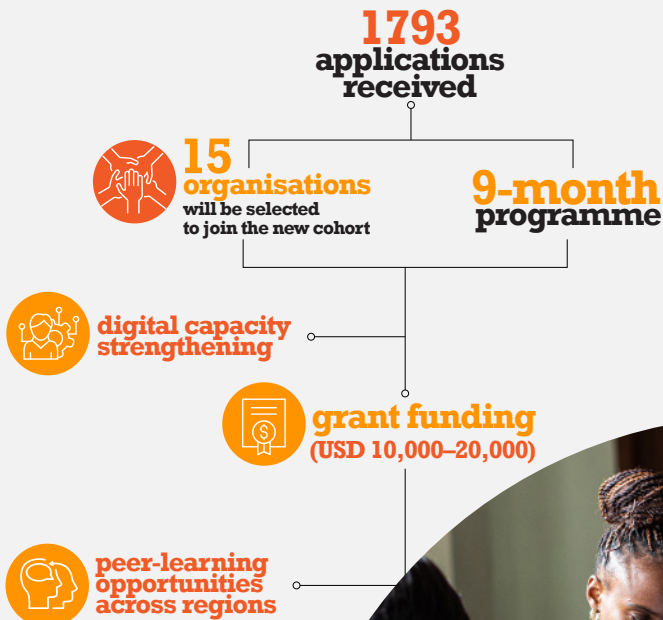
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## Digital Action Lab Launch of Digital Action Lab – Cohort 3 Attracts Record Interest

The Digital Action Lab launched its call for applications for Cohort 3 in April 2026, inviting civil society organisations across the Global South to strengthen democracy and civic space through digital innovation.

The call received an impressive 1,793 applications, reflecting the growing demand for digital transformation support within civil society. The selection process is currently underway through multiple stages, including application reviews, video submissions, and digital maturity assessments. Following this process, 15 organisations will be selected to join the new cohort.



Over nine months, selected organisations will receive grant funding of USD 10,000 – 20,000, tailored digital capacity strengthening, and opportunities for peer learning and collaboration. Building on the success of previous cohorts, DAL continues to empower civil society organisations to develop innovative digital solutions that advance civic engagement, inclusion, and rights protection.





## Cross-regional connections and learning

The event gathered representatives from DAL cohort 2 organisations, along with digital experts and CIVICUS team members, creating a dynamic space for knowledge exchange and collective reflection.

# Digital Action Lab Peer Learning Exchange Held in Kigali

The Digital Action Lab (DAL) successfully convened a peer learning exchange in Kigali, bringing together civil society partners from across regions to strengthen collaboration and share experiences in advancing digital democracy.

The exchange fostered cross-regional connections and practical learning, equipping organisations with strategies to enhance their impact and sustainability. This initiative reinforces DAL's commitment to building a strong, collaborative ecosystem of civil society actors leveraging digital approaches to protect and expand civic space globally.

[Watch highlights from the peer learning session here](#)

## Digital Resiliency Grants

### Digital resilience under pressure

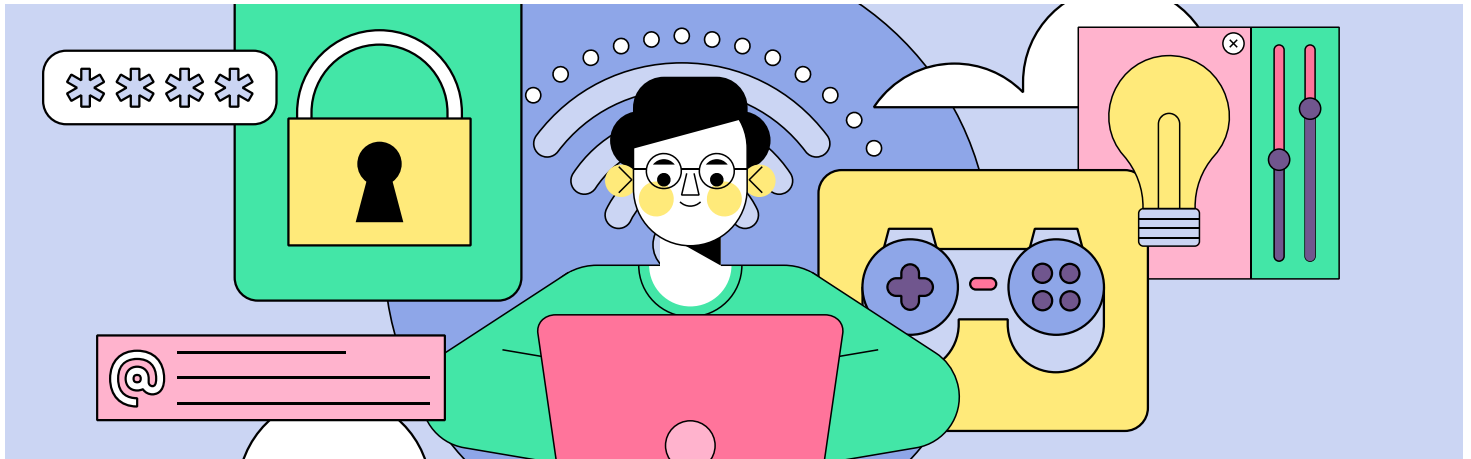
**We have started 2026 by supporting digital resilience initiatives across high-risk contexts.**

New Digital Resiliency Grants partners operate in very different environments, yet similar pressure points are emerging. Surveillance is becoming more normalised, while legal and administrative measures are increasingly used to constrain civic actors. Online spaces remain essential for participation but are also a growing source of risk. Gaps in secure reporting, uneven access to trusted tools and exposure to disinformation continue to shape how communities engage.

In response, partners are prioritising practical resilience. This includes building digital security skills, strengthening safe documentation of human rights violations, and improving preparedness for disruptions. It also means providing legal and psychosocial support to help individuals navigate intimidation, stress and risk, and enabling frontline activists to stay connected and coordinated to continue working under pressure.

A key takeaway from this cycle is that resilience does not depend on a single tool, but on comprehensive support that fosters people’s ability to sustain their work in challenging and evolving conditions.

[Apply for our Digital Resiliency Grants](#)



## Regional Support Mechanisms

### Young Tech Collective (YTC)

Our partner for the Regional Support Mechanisms in East Asia, TIFA Foundation, Indonesia closed a call for the Young Tech Collective initiative and onboarded cohort participants in the month of May 2026. The onboarding session was done in collaboration with the Digital Defenders Partnership, closely aligning on issues related to digital security. The Young Tech Collective is a non-financial support programme that strengthens civil society organisations’ digital protection and resilience. Complementary to the Re-D Fund, it provides tailored training, mentoring, and peer learning to help organisations improve their digital security practices and build stronger internal systems.



# DRAPAC 2026

DDI's East Asia Regional Support Mechanism Host Partner, Tifa Foundation, will host a closed session focused on the growing funding crisis threatening digital rights advocacy across Southeast Asia; a candid conversation about the collapse of resources at precisely the moment they are needed most.

Co-organized with Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) and Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA), the roundtable will bring together civil society leaders, regional funders, and donor representatives to move from diagnosis to strategy. Discussions will cover the real cost of donor retreat, what resourceful survival looks like in practice, and how donors can shift from funding individual organizations to sustaining the broader ecosystem. The role of intermediaries, nimble local funding mechanisms, and the EU's Digital Democracy Initiative are among the concrete models to be examined.

The session will close with a push for more systematic ways for civil society to shape, not just respond to donors' funding strategies, and a set of shared commitments for follow-up.

# DDISA Fund Launch

DDI's Sub-Saharan Africa regional support mechanism host partner, Wits Enterprise, CTIN and OpenUp have successfully launched and closed Cohort 1 funding applications for local civil society actors in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Watch this space and our social media channels for the call for application for Cohort 2 of the fund.

# Election Work 2026

**The Digital Democracy Initiative is expanding its electoral integrity work with interventions in**

**Brazil**   **Nigeria**

**In Brazil** – Ahead of Brazil's 2026 elections, Politize! and Toda Cidadã are implementing a joint intervention to counter electoral disinformation in Brazil. The project combines research mapping misinformation narratives, digital content dissemination to a 600,000+ audience, integration of two digital tools – the IAgora? game and the Maria Valente WhatsApp chatbot – and community outreach through a volunteer network spanning 19 states. Expected outcome: strengthened capacity of citizens to identify and resist misinformation ahead of the vote.

**In Nigeria** – CIVICUS is partnering with Brain Builders Youth Development (BBYD) Initiative and Initiatives for AI, Factchecking, Research, Digital Rights and Development (FactCheck Africa) to safeguard the Nigerian electoral space against the growing threats of information disorder. In an era where generative AI and sophisticated deepfakes threaten to undermine democratic trust.

These initiatives reflect DDI's growing commitment to supporting inclusive and credible electoral processes across its regions of implementation. There are upcoming interventions in Gambia. Further details on implementing partners, scope of work will be confirmed as planning progresses.



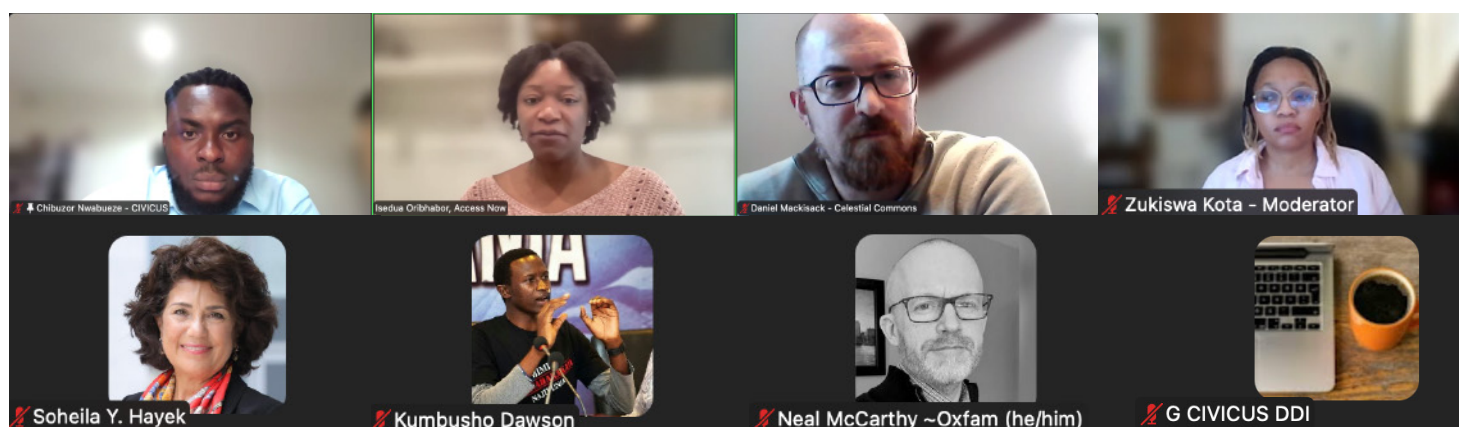
# Events & Engagements

## *Digital Dialogue: Digital Democracy Scenarios*

Chibuzor Nwabueze, Programme & Network Coordinator at CIVICUS DDI, participated in a webinar hosted by the International Civil Society Centre on “Digital Democracy Scenarios: Deepening Social Justice or Introducing New Gatekeeping?”

The discussion explored the evolving role of digital technologies in shaping democratic participation, with particular focus on challenges in the Global South.

[Watch the full session here!](#)



## Featured Insight

### The Ballot Box Illusion: Elections and Democratic Decline in Africa

A recent article by Chibuzor Nwabueze and Mighulo Masaka, published by Inter Press Service, examines the troubling trend of democratic backsliding across Africa. The piece explores how elections in several countries are increasingly being used to legitimise authoritarian governance, with limited genuine political choice despite formal electoral processes. It offers a critical reflection on how democratic institutions are being reshaped, and why safeguarding electoral integrity remains central to protecting civic space.

**Read the article:**

[\*\*\*The Ballot Box Illusion: How Authoritarians Repackaged the African Ballot | Inter Press Service\*\*\*](#)

[Read our earlier newsletters here!](#)