



TERMS OF REFERENCE

A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TOOLS ON THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

March 2025

a. About Mzalendo Trust

Mzalendo ('Patriot' in Swahili) Trust is a Kenyan non-partisan Parliamentary Monitoring Organization whose mission is to promote 'open, inclusive, and accountable parliaments in Kenya and Africa.' We do so by creating and managing civic tech tools, producing evidence-based research, and leading and facilitating advocacy and partnerships with Parliaments, citizens, and other relevant stakeholders. We believe that success in our work will build more effective and responsive legislation and political processes that support Kenya's national development goals. We anchor our work on three main pillars: openness, inclusion and accountability as enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya 2010, SDG 5, and SDG 16.

As part of its mission to promote open, inclusive, and accountable Parliaments in Kenya and Africa through civic tech tools, Mzalendo Trust fosters democratic, safe, and inclusive digital spaces by enhancing civic awareness of digital rights and access to information.

b. About the Kensafe Space Project

The KenSafe Space Project is supported by the European Union and aims to strengthen the capacity and voice of Kenyan civil society and human rights organizations in promoting and safeguarding a democratic, safe, and inclusive digital space. The project intends to implement initiatives that counter online disinformation, hate speech, cyberbullying, and cyberstalking while co-creating human-centered and rights-based digital policies and solutions.

c. Background Information

Civic technology tools, which are digital platforms, applications, or systems designed to enhance civic engagement, government transparency, and public participation in decision-making, have served as a bridge between citizens, civil society organisations, and government, enabling more open, inclusive and accountable governance. They have been integral in improving access to information, facilitating communication, and fostering collaboration between different groups, civic tech and citizens, empowering them to engage with policies and contribute to decision-making, especially in the legislative process.

Digital democracy, powered by civic technology, has the potential to enhance political participation, advocate for transparency and accountability in governance systems, and drive efficiency in governance systems. A surge in citizen engagement has been observed in the recent past; holding testament to that, as different groups of citizens, especially the youth, leveraged the power of different online platforms to amplify their voices and directly engage in different political processes.

Whilst internet penetration in Kenya stands at around 40.8%, with an average increase of 2% in internet users annually, around 32.93 million Kenyans still do not use the internet, which amounts to around 59.2% of Kenya's population.¹ This, therefore suggests disparities in access to the internet, and hence civic-technology tools, by a huge part of Kenya's population. Marginalized groups—particularly women, youth, and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) from underrepresented communities—often face systemic barriers to accessing the internet, from economic, geographical and even social marginalization, curtailing their utilization of digital tools for civic engagement. Limited digital literacy, socio-economic disparities, online harassment, and inadequate policy frameworks to cushion them further exacerbate the exclusion of these groups from digital democratic spaces.

d. Objectives of the Study

It is against the foregoing background that Mzalendo seeks to engage a consultant to conduct a study assessing the impact of digital tools on the political participation of marginalized communities. This study further seeks to enhance participatory democracy by exploring both opportunities and challenges such groups encounter while utilizing civic technology tools and online platforms to influence governance and decision-making processes.

The study will also generate evidence-based insights to inform policy and advocacy initiatives aimed at bridging the digital participation gap. By analyzing the effectiveness of existing digital tools and platforms, assessing policy gaps, and gathering perspectives from the public and key stakeholders, the research will provide actionable recommendations to enhance digital inclusivity and ensure that marginalized communities can be active participants in this democracy.

Further specific objectives of the study include:

- Evaluate whether marginalized groups use civic-tech tools to enhance their democratic participation;
- Examine how digital tools influence the participation of marginalized groups in democratic processes;
- Identify the challenges and barriers to digital participation for women, youth and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) from marginalized communities;
- Highlight the existing laws and policies that promote digital democracy among these groups (and any gaps); and
- Provide actionable recommendations to enhance the digital inclusion and democratic participation of these groups.

e. Scope of Work & Methodology

To reach the objectives, the consultant will perform the following tasks:

1. Conduct a comprehensive literature review on digital democracy in Kenya, with a focus on the political participation of marginalized communities.
2. Conduct an evidence-based online survey, mapping out the impact of different tools among the marginalized groups.

¹ [Digital 2024: Kenya — DataReportal – Global Digital Insights](#) as accessed on 14/03/2024

3. Qualitatively engage key stakeholders on the subject through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), including policymakers, civil society organizations, and digital rights advocates.
4. Analyze findings to draw insights into the impact, challenges, and opportunities related to digital democracy.
5. Facilitate a validation forum with selected representatives of women, youth, and PWDs to capture their lived experiences and perspectives as well as validate the findings.
6. Develop a final report with key findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

f. Deliverables

The Consultant is expected to deliver the following outputs within **twenty (20) working days**:

- **An Inception Report:** Outlining the study approach, methodology and workplan.
- **A Draft Report:** Presenting preliminary findings for review and feedback.
- **A Final Report:** Incorporating feedback and providing key insights and recommendations.

g. Liaison, Coordination and Reporting

The Consultant will report to the Programme Coordinator, Mzalendo Trust, **Mr. Edward Kakumu** (edward@mzalendo.com)

h. Qualifications of the Consultant

The consultant should meet the following criteria:

- A degree in Information Technology, Communication, Public Policy, Law, or any other related field, with a demonstrated understanding of policy formulation processes;
- Experience in conducting policy research, impact assessments, or evaluations related to digital technologies, governance, or civic engagement;
- A strong understanding of civic technology tools and how they encourage participation; and
- Familiarity with digital inclusion, online safety, and accessibility concerns affecting marginalized groups.

i. Contract Period

The Consultant will be engaged for a period of **20 days** spread over **April 2025** and effective from the signing of the contract. The final report should be made available to Mzalendo Trust on or before 2nd May 2025.

j. Intellectual Property Rights

The consultant expressly assigns to Mzalendo Trust any copyright arising from the outputs produced while executing the service contract. The consultant may not use, reproduce, disseminate, or authorize others to use, reproduce or disseminate any work produced under the service contract without prior consent from Mzalendo Trust.

k. Confidentiality

The consultant shall maintain strict confidentiality regarding all information obtained during the assignment and shall not disclose any such information to third parties without the prior written consent of Mzalendo Trust.

I. Terms of Service

This is a non-staff contract; therefore, the consultant is not entitled to insurance, medical cover, or other status or conditions as Mzalendo Staff.

m. How to Apply

- The Consultant is required to submit a technical and financial proposal as part of their application.
- The technical proposal should include a summary of the applicant's qualifications and experience and a detailed methodology, outlining how they will approach and complete the assignment within the timeframe outlined. The technical proposal should also contain CVs of key team members and professional references.
- The financial proposal should indicate the all-inclusive fixed total contract price and be supported by a breakdown of costs by activities.
- The proposal should be sent to community@mzalendo.com by **28th March 2025** End of Day.
- The application subject line should clearly indicate 'Development of Report – Impact of Civic-tech tools.'
- Any clarification should be emailed to community@mzalendo.com before 25th March 2025.

Please note:

Mzalendo Trust is committed to the prevention of any type of unwanted behavior, including sexual harassment, exploitation, abuse, and lack of integrity, as well as other ethical breaches. All staff and consultants are expected to share this commitment through our Code of Conduct and Safeguarding Policy. Offers of employment will be subject to satisfactory references and appropriate screening checks, which can include criminal records and fraud. We welcome young people and women from diverse backgrounds, cultures and experiences. By submitting your application, you acknowledge that you have given consent to the collection, use and/or disclosure of your data by us for the purposes set out in this Terms of Reference.