

Digital Advocacy in Zimbabwe: A Baseline Study for Youth Collective Action for Social Transformation (YCA4SoTra) Project



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In Partnership with
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SAYWHAT,
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And
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Acronyms

AUDRi – The Alliance for Universal Digital Rights

CBO – Community -Based Organisations (s

CSO -Civil Society Organisations (s)

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

KII – Key Informant interviews

SWOT – Stregnth, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

WILD - Women’s Institute for Leadership Development

YCA4SOTRA – Youth Collective Action for Social Transformation Alliance

Executive summary

Climate change presents a profound challenge to youth development across Africa, with far-reaching implications for food security, economic opportunities, and overall well-being (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021; Asare-Nuamah et al., 2025). The continent's vulnerability to climate change stems from its heavy reliance on agriculture and limited capacity to adapt to environmental shifts (Connolly-Boutin & Smit, 2015). In southern Africa, countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa, and Zambia present numerous opportunities for community-led initiatives and partnerships with local governments to support development strategies. Youth in Zimbabwe make up the majority of the population. The median age of the nation's population, is 18.7 years. The youth unemployment rate, officially at 27% in 2022, but likely massively underreported is one of the significant challenges youth face in the country. Also, poverty rates amongst them is high. Digital access and rights are compromised, and uptake of digital tools for development is slow especially by young men and women. These factors undermine the potential demographic dividend offered by the large youth population. While digital tools offer a promising avenue for youth voices to be heard in green economic opportunities, a significant digital divide persists between urban and rural youth. The Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD), in partnership with SAYWHAT and Save the Children funded by European Union conducted this baseline study on digital advocacy platforms for youth in Zimbabwe. The study was conducted to inform the Youth Collective Action for Social Transformation Alliance (Yca4soTra) project, currently being implemented by the consortium. The YCA4SoTra project aims to empower young people in utilizing digital technologies so that they are able to advocate for green economic opportunities and environmentally sustainable policies. The broad aim of the baseline study is to enhance the consortium's understanding of youth digital technology use for advocacy within the YCA4SoTra project by;

- Providing a clear reference point against which future project outcomes and impacts can be measured.
- Identifying the specific needs, challenges, and gaps within the target population

Given the time constraints that was available to researchers, this baseline study adopted a rapid assessment approach research design. The target participants were young women, young men, people with disabilities, Youth-led CSOs and CBOs, local authority officials and local government officials. Data was collected from four focus group discussions (FGD) from four districts, 12 key informant interviews (KII) from four districts and from 107 youth who completed an online individual youth survey from four districts. All baseline study participants were selected purposively.

The survey revealed key demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the surveyed youth population. Majority (61.7%) resided in urban areas, while 27.1% lived in rural areas. Most of the surveyed youth were single (64.49%), with 23.36% being single parents. In terms of living arrangements, 60.8% lived with parents, siblings, or other relatives. Educationally, half of the youth (50.47%) had completed tertiary education, while 28.04% had completed secondary education. Smartphone ownership was widespread, with 87.85% of the youth owning a smartphone, and WhatsApp emerged as the most popular platform, used by 96% of respondents. Additionally, 64.5% of the youth accessed their social media accounts daily, primarily through WhatsApp. Economically, the average monthly income was US\$ 107. On average, youth spent US\$14.2 monthly on general data and US\$8. on WhatsApp data. Despite their connectivity, many youths perceived challenges in accessing political voice (53.1%), income (55.1%), and fair distribution of resources (61.7%).

Environmental awareness and concerns were prominent among the surveyed youth. A majority (70.1%) were aware of challenges related to freshwater withdrawals, while climate change was identified as the biggest environmental problem by 91.6% of respondents. Land use conversion, such as converting forests to farmland or urban areas, was another significant concern for 65.4% of youth, followed by biodiversity loss, noted by 57%. In terms of green initiatives, urban agriculture, including community gardens and vertical farming, was the most preferred (69%), while green clinics, particularly solar-powered facilities, were the most identified green initiative in the surveyed districts (68.2%). However, digital advocacy participation was low, with 67.3% of youth not yet engaged in such activities. Challenges included expensive data tariffs and lack of access to affordable internet. WhatsApp was the primary platform for digital advocacy (81.0%), yet 66.4% of youth did not interact with local authorities digitally, and 73.8% lacked training in digital advocacy. Furthermore, 70.1% did not engage with political or traditional leaders through digital channels. Awareness of digital rights and legislative frameworks was also limited, with 52.3% unaware of their digital rights and 60.8% reporting low awareness of digital legislative frameworks by stakeholders.

Recommendations were as follows:

- Develop educational programmes focused on digital rights, legislative frameworks, and environmental sustainability
- Improve access to affordable digital technologies and internet connectivity for both youth and other stakeholders with the aim of democratizing the internet space, by ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their location or socio-economic status, have equal opportunities to access and benefit from digital resources.

- Strengthen the capacity-of youth-led organizations and community-based organizations (CBOs) for them to effectively advocate for digital rights and environmental issues.
- Establish funding mechanisms specifically aimed at supporting youth-led green initiatives
- Foster stronger collaboration between youth, local authorities, and civil society organizations to promote active participation in decision-making processes.
- Support and promote youth-led projects focused on urban agriculture, water harvesting in rural areas, renewable energy, and other sustainable practices
- Launch targeted advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about digital rights and the importance of a green economy

Introduction

Climate change presents a profound challenge to youth development across Africa, with far-reaching implications for food security, economic opportunities, and overall well-being (Hope, 2009). The continent's vulnerability to climate change stems from its heavy reliance on agriculture and limited capacity to adapt to environmental shifts (Connolly-Boutin & Smit, 2015). In sub-Saharan Africa, projections indicate an average increase in air temperatures of 2.1°C by 2050, with regional variations in rainfall patterns, particularly in maize-producing areas (Cairns et al., 2013). This climatic disruption severely affects agricultural productivity and exacerbates existing poverty and food insecurity issues, disproportionately impacting young people (Connolly-Boutin & Smit, 2015; Müller et al., 2014). The confluence of climate change, political instability, and economic crises may create a "poverty trap" that hinders youth development and economic growth (Delgado et al., 2023; Devitt & Tol, 2012).

Nevertheless, there are significant opportunities for youth engagement in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. For instance, the development of climate-resilient agricultural practices, such as improved maize germplasm and advanced management techniques, offers potential employment avenues for young people in agriculture (Cairns et al., 2013). Moreover, investments in renewable energy, particularly hydropower, hold promise for creating jobs and enhancing access to electricity, thereby improving youth education and economic prospects (Lumbroso et al., 2015). To ensure sustainable development beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, African nations are now prioritising innovations and evaluations, accompanied by strong political will, in implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with particular emphasis on youth empowerment and climate action (Odey et al., 2021). Subsequently, many developing countries are also exhibiting growing interest in green economy opportunities in response to their disproportionately high vulnerability to climate impacts such as rising sea levels, droughts and extreme weather events and their heavy reliance on natural resources such as forests, water and minerals which can lead to depletion and degradation.

In parallel, digital platforms have become pivotal tools for youth advocacy of green economy opportunities in Africa, providing innovative avenues for engagement, mobilization, and societal change. Youths in Sub-Saharan Africa are increasingly leveraging digital technologies to foster community engagement, disseminate critical information, and mobilize for social change, even in the face of limited internet access and government restrictions (Gondwe, 2024). Digital activism has proven to be an essential mechanism for challenging inequality, particularly for marginalized groups (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017). Social media platforms, such as Twitter, have played a crucial role in youth-driven campaigns like the "Rhodes Must Fall" and "Fees Must Fall" movements in South Africa, thereby influencing public discourse and political activism

(Bosch, 2016). While digital platforms have become central to youth-led micro mobilization, traditional institutional support and established networks continue to play a vital role in advocacy, suggesting that digital tools complement, rather than replace, traditional advocacy approaches (Maher & Earl, 2019).

Civil society organisations (CSOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), particularly those led by youths, encounter a range of challenges and opportunities to address societal issues and promote community development. Key obstacles include limited access to resources and funding, which may compromise the independence and efficacy of these organisations in their advocacy roles (Arvidson et al., 2017). Furthermore, the difficulty of accessing and utilizing data for community development, exacerbated by low data literacy and inadequate data infrastructure, poses additional challenges (Yoon & Copeland, 2020). Despite these constraints, CSOs and CBOs have demonstrated remarkable adaptability, often innovating in education and employment preparation (Heath & Mclaughlin, 1994).

According to Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) (2024), in the second quarter of 2024, the number of active mobile subscriptions increased by 0.64%, rising to nearly 14.8 million, which also led to a slight increase in the mobile penetration rate to 96.76%¹. According to Datareportal (2024) Zimbabwe had 5.48 million internet users at the start of 2024, representing an internet penetration rate of 32.6 percent of the total population². In terms of internet speeds, the median mobile internet connection speed via cellular networks was 32.41 Mbps, while the median fixed internet connection speed was 16.00 Mbps. Social media usage was considerable, with 2.05 million users in January 2024, accounting for 12.2 percent of the population. Facebook dominated the social media landscape, with 2.05 million users, representing 12.2 percent of the total population and 37.4 percent of the internet user base. Interestingly, 18.8 percent of Facebook's eligible audience (aged 13 and above) in Zimbabwe used the platform, with a gender distribution of 43.6 percent female and 56.4 percent male users.

Other social media platforms also had notable user bases in Zimbabwe. Instagram recorded 580 000 users, while LinkedIn had 890 000 members, equivalent to 5.3 percent of the population. X (formerly Twitter) had 336 300 users, representing 2.0 percent of the population. Usage of Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn has been growing over the years and this reflected the potential for digital engagement and advocacy among Zimbabwe's population.

¹ <https://t3n9sm.c2.acecdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Second-Quarter-2024-Abridged-Sector-Performance-Report.pdf>

² <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-zimbabwe?rq=Zimbabwe%202024>

However, in Zimbabwe, internet disruptions and restrictions on digital rights also have been a recurring issue, particularly during critical periods such as elections according to Paradigm Initiative (2024)³. At the height of the 2023 elections, internet speeds were deliberately throttled, affecting major mobile network providers like Econet, NetOne, TelOne, Telecel, and Liquid Technologies. This throttling significantly limited internet access for users, with platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook becoming less accessible. A Netblocks report confirmed that internet services were degraded on the eve of the elections, depriving the public of crucial information. Additionally, frequent electricity disruptions in urban areas further impeded internet accessibility. Hyperinflation also exacerbated the situation, making it difficult for many to afford internet services. In the lead-up to the August 2023 elections, the online space became a hotspot for disinformation, with WhatsApp emerging as a key platform for the rapid spread of fake videos and images, marking a shift from previous years when platforms like Twitter (X) and Facebook were more prominent.

Zimbabwe's legal framework has also raised concerns regarding digital rights and freedoms. In 2021, the Cyber and Data Protection Act was enacted to establish baseline protections for personal information, requiring data controllers to handle personal data fairly and lawfully. However, in July 2023, the government introduced the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Act, commonly known as the "Patriotic Bill," which has been widely criticized by United Nations mandate holders and international human rights organizations. The Act's broad provisions are seen as potentially harmful to human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. Critics argue that the law could lead to a crackdown on civic participation and limit the ability of Zimbabwean nationals to freely express themselves, both offline and online. These developments highlight the ongoing challenges to internet freedom and digital rights in Zimbabwe.

In southern Africa, countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa, and Zambia present numerous opportunities for community-led initiatives and partnerships with local governments to support their development strategies. For example, in Zimbabwe, community-led mapping and enumerations have been successfully used to establish partnerships with local authorities to develop pro-poor sanitation strategies (Banana et al., 2015). This model offers valuable insights for youth-led green economy initiatives, particularly in agriculture and renewable energy sectors. Expanding soybean production in southern Africa presents an opportunity for youth involvement in sustainable agriculture (Giller et al., 1998), whereas South Africa's more developed institutional structures could provide a foundation for youth advocacy in the green economy sector (Hernandez-Villafuerte et al., 2016).

³ <https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Zimbabwe-Country-Report.pdf>

Youths in Zimbabwe comprise the majority of the population. The median age of the nation's population, is 18.7 years⁴. The youth unemployment rate, officially at 27%⁵ in 2022, but likely massively underreported, is one of the significant challenges faced by youth in the country. Also, poverty rates amongst them is high⁶. Likewise, climate change has increased natural disasters and weather disruptions that have contributed to income vulnerability and food insecurity, especially in agricultural rural areas. Furthermore, Zimbabwe has among the highest reported rates of HIV/AIDS and sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination in the region, with young women and special populations particularly impacted.

Digital access and rights are compromised, and the uptake of digital tools for development is slow, especially for young men and women. These factors undermine the potential demographic dividends offered by the large youth population. While digital tools offer a promising avenue for youth voices to be heard in green economic opportunities, a significant digital divide persists between urban and rural youths. This divide is even more pronounced for young people with disabilities, adolescent girls, young women, and those from resource-limited communities. Additionally, digital technologies have not reached their full potential to foster two-way communication between youth and decision-makers.

1.1. Background

The Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD), in partnership with SAYWHAT and Save the Children funded by European Union conducted this baseline study of digital advocacy platforms for youth in Zimbabwe. This study was conducted to inform the Youth Collective Action for Social Transformation (YCA4SoTra) project that is currently being implemented by the consortium. The YCA4SoTra project aims to empower young people in utilizing digital technologies so that they are able to advocate for green economic opportunities and environmentally sustainable policies. The overall goal of the project is to strengthen the engagement of local Civil Society Organizations' (CSOs) as actors of good governance and development in Zimbabwe. In doing so, the project will strengthen the capacity of youth organizations, including organizations for young women and young people with disabilities, in movement building and effective representation to engage in policy dialogue at sub-national and national levels. Furthermore, the project will contribute to inclusive youth by developing economic empowerment an enabling environment for green jobs. Based on

⁴ Zimbabwe Population 2022 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs) (worldpopulationreview.com)

⁵ Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency

⁶ Zimbabwe Unemployment Rate 2022 & Employment Data | [Take-profit.org](https://take-profit.org).

the expected outcomes of the project, this baseline study is aimed at enhancing the consortium's understanding of youth digital technology use for advocacy within the YCA4SoTra project. This baseline study will assess the current landscape of digital platform uptake among youth in the project districts, including Zimbabwe in general, identify challenges and opportunities, and provide recommendations for enhancing their effectiveness in promoting youth participation in governance and policy dialogue. The study was conducted in three project provinces namely Matabeleland South (2 Districts), Bulawayo Metropolitan and Matabeleland North (1 District). The target study population was young women, young men, people with disabilities, Youth-led CSOs and CBOs and stakeholders working with youth e.g. Councilors, Local government officials

1.2. Objectives

The baseline study aimed to enhance the consortium's understanding of youth digital technology use for advocacy within the YCA4SoTra project. It serves as a clear reference point for measuring future project outcomes and impacts, while also identifying specific needs, challenges, and gaps within the target population. By providing critical insights into youth engagement with digital tools, this study shades light on what should be included in the YCA4SoTra project digital advocacy strategy for green opportunities.



Methodology

The following are the methods that were adopted for this baseline study.

1.3. Study design and frameworks

Given the time constraints that was available to researchers, this baseline study adopted a rapid assessment research design. The design uses both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The concepts and frameworks that underpinned this baseline study were the Doughnut Economics Concept, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Green Economy Framework, Digital Framework, Civic Engagement and Digital Participation Framework, Stakeholder Theory, and the Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis framework⁷⁸.

- **Doughnut economics concept** – Doughnut Economics is a model developed by economist Kate Raworth that aims to balance essential human needs and planetary boundaries⁹. The concept integrates social, economic, and environmental considerations, rather than treating them as separate issues. It advocates for systems that regenerate natural resources and distribute wealth and resources fairly. The ultimate aim is to enhance human well-being rather than merely focusing on economic growth. The concept guided the baseline study's focus on sustainable development and human well-being.
- **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) green economy framework** – In the framework, low carbon, resource efficiency, and social inclusion are characteristics of a green economy¹⁰. In a green economy, public and private investment drive growth in employment and incomes. The two sectors invest in infrastructure, assets and economic activities that allow reduced carbon emissions and pollution, enhanced energy and resource efficiency, and prevention of the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The framework informed the baseline study's environmental components, in particular on climate change, biodiversity, green economy opportunities and challenges analysis.
- **Digital framework**- The framework developed by The Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRi) developed a framework outlining key principles for a just

⁷ <https://doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics>

⁸ <https://www.unep.org/regions/asia-and-pacific/regional-initiatives/supporting-resource-efficiency/green-economy>

⁹ <https://doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics>

¹⁰ <https://www.unep.org/regions/asia-and-pacific/regional-initiatives/supporting-resource-efficiency/green-economy>

and equitable digital future¹¹. This framework aims to ensure that everyone can enjoy equal rights to safety, freedom, and dignity in the digital world. The framework looks at how factors such as gender, race, disability, and other things all work together to create different kinds of online problems for different people. It recognizes that everyone experiences the internet differently, and that solutions need to address these unique experiences. The framework informed the baseline study's analysis of digital infrastructure, access, literacy and rights

- **Digital civic engagement by youth framework** – This was a hybrid of the United Nations Children's Fund's rapid analysis of digital civic engagement by young people¹² and online civic engagement framework¹³ which aims to understand citizen engagement with e-government by considering both the supply and demand sides of e-government services. The supply side refers to the availability and accessibility of e-government services while the demand side refers to citizen willingness to interact with government online. This framework guided the baseline study's examination of citizen participation, digital activism, and inclusive decision-making.

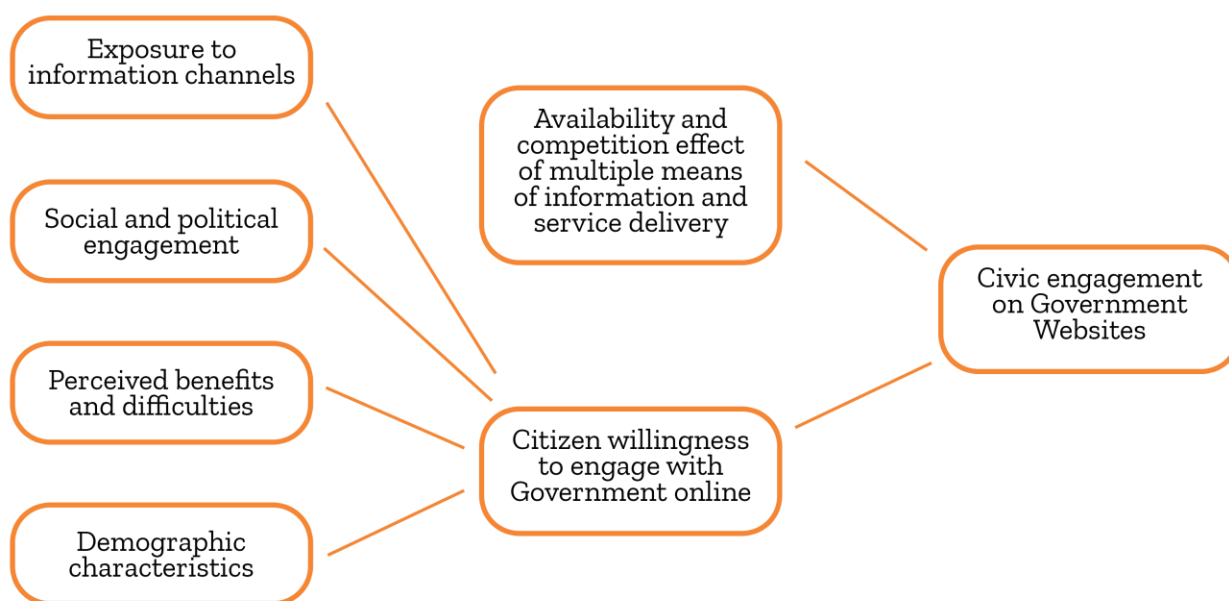


Figure 1: Online citizen engagement

¹¹ [https://www.un.org/techenvoy/sites/www.un.org.techenvoy/files/230203 Alliance for Universal Digital Rights.pdf](https://www.un.org/techenvoy/sites/www.un.org.techenvoy/files/230203_Alliance_for_Universal_Digital_Rights.pdf)

¹² <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/digital-civic-engagement-young-people>

¹³ [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220527009 Electronic Government and Online Engagement Citizen Interaction with Government via Web Portals](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220527009_Electronic_Government_and_Online_Engagement_Citizen_Interaction_with_Government_via_Web_Portals)

- **Stakeholder theory** – In this theory organizations should not only consider their shareholders' interests but those of other stakeholders as well. These may include individuals, groups, or organizations who are interested in or affected by an organization's activities or they may also include suppliers, employees, investors, customers, regulators, community members, and advocacy groups. The theory informed the baseline study's stakeholder engagement and participation strategies with a particular focus on youth, but more so young women in their diversity and people with disabilities
- **SWOT analysis framework.** This framework analyses strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of any given issues. The framework guided the identification of opportunities, and threats analysis thus synthesizing findings from the various frameworks to identify key areas for improvement and opportunities

1.4. Key phases of the baseline study

The baseline study was executed in four main phases namely:

- **Phase 1:** Inception and preparation phase - Under this phase, preliminary discussions with WILD were undertaken along with a review of key relevant literature. The process of literature review was however ongoing throughout the baseline study as it was critical in informing the theoretical underpinnings and context of various aspects under investigation. The output of this phase was the inception report that was presented to WILD for feedback prior to the data collection phase.
- **Phase 2:** Data collection phase - Fieldwork was conducted at the YCA4SoTra project sites with the main output being the gathered baseline data. Data was collected from four districts whose selection was guided by the WILD; Bulawayo Metropolitan, Matabeleland North (1 District) and Matabeleland South (2 Districts).
- **Phase 3:** Data analysis phase – Quantitative data was aggregated in preparation for compiling the draft baseline report, with data analysis also guided by the key themes developed from the baseline Terms of Reference (ToR).
- **Phase 4:** Reporting phase – The team developed an initial draft baseline report which was shared with WILD and partners for review, feedback and validation before its finalization.
- **Phase 5:** Report finalization – The researchers revised the draft report to incorporate feedback from WILD and partners and then submitted this final report.

1.5. Baseline study sites

As guided by WILD, the baseline study covered four districts namely Bulawayo, two districts from Matabeleland South and one from Matabeleland North. In each district, three wards were selected for data collection. In order to ensure balanced representation geographical considerations were taken in selecting the wards. The first Ward selected was close to the district business centre, the second was moderately close to the district business centre and the third ward was furthest from the district business centre.

1.6. Target participants, sample size and sampling

The target participants were young women, young men, people with disabilities, youth-led CSOs and CBOs, local authority officials and local government officials. As this baseline was a rapid assessment, focus group discussion (FGD) participants were purposively sampled while a snowball sampling approach was adopted for the online individual youth survey. In this, youth 10 (6 female, 4 male) were first purposively identified in each district and then asked to look for four friends of his/her gender to fill up the online survey. A total of 200 youths were targeted to fill up the questionnaire but only 107 managed to submit filled questionnaires as follows: Bulawayo -29, Gwanda-25, Matobo-27, and Binga-26. The margin of error for 107 sample size is 9.47 % which is less than the acceptable threshold of 10% for quantitative surveys. The margin of error is a statistical measure that indicates the range within which the true value of a population parameter is likely to fall, based on the results of a sample. It reflects the level of uncertainty or potential error in survey results caused by sampling variability. The snowball technique was also used for identification of key informant interviewees with WILD and local partners providing additional guidance.

1.7. Primary data collection methods and tools

Table 1 presents the data collection methods, i.e., focus group discussions (FGD), key informant interviews (KII) and online individual youth survey that were utilized for this baseline study.

Table 1: Data collection methods and participants

Stakeholder/Data source	Data collection method		
	FGD	Online Survey	KII
Young people/youths	4	107	

Youth-led CSO/CBOs			2
Local authority officials			4
Local government officials			4
Community journalist			1
Youth activist			1
Total	4	107	12

Focus group discussions (FGD) – FGDs participants were primarily young people and one FGD was conducted per district. Ten participants from the selected wards in each district were invited to participate in the discussions. WILD local partners provided assistance in mobilizing the young people for participation in the FGDs. For each of the FGDs, intentional efforts were made to ensure that young women constituted 60% of the FGD participants. The discussions were guided by the baseline questions in the FGD guide attached below. One consultant was assigned the task of facilitating the discussions, while the other two assisted with note taking. All the FGDs were conducted at a location at the district centre with WILD providing the logistics for participants to attend the FGDs. Below is the FGD guide that was used.

BASELINE STUDY ON DIGITAL ADVOCACY PLATFORMS FOR YOUTH IN ZIMBABWE

Focus Group Discussion Guide

January 2025

The Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD), in partnership with SAYWHAT and Save the Children, is conducting a study on digital platform usage for youth advocacy in Zimbabwe. The study will inform a YCA4SoTra project aimed at empowering young people to utilize digital technologies to advocate for green economic opportunities and environmentally sustainable policies. The study is assessing the current landscape of digital platform uptake among Zimbabwean youth, identify challenges and opportunities, and provide recommendations for enhancing their effectiveness in promoting youth participation in governance and policy dialogue. Participation is voluntary, and without coercion. Participants can withdraw at any time without facing any penalties. Participation in the study is not associated with financial and non financial benefits currently and in the future.

- **Welcome participants:** Briefly introduce the purpose of the discussion.
- **Ground rules:** Ensure respectful dialogue, confidentiality, and encourage all voices to be heard.

Date:_____ Venue:_____

SECTION A: PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION

Questions	Responses and codes
District	1=Gwanda 2=Matobo 3=Lupane 4=Bulawayo
Ward	
Village/location	
Nature of Village/location	1=Rural 2=Urban 3=Peri-urban
Number of participants by gender	Male:
	Female:
	Other:

Broad questions	Probing questions
Which social media platforms do you use most frequently?	Probe for frequency, reasons for use, challenges and opportunities, other youths, types of content they engage with on the platforms
What are the main sources of income and expenditures for youth?	Probe for budget for data
What is the social status of many young people?	Probe for where they live, access to network, marital status, phones they have, whether afford data

SECTION B: ESSENTIAL HUMAN NEEDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL LIMITS

Broad questions	Probing questions
How easy is it for you to have or access basic human essential needs (Shortfalls)?	For example, food, water, housing, education, healthcare, energy, income, fair treatment on resource distribution, political voice, networks

	Gender equality, peace and justice
How have you noticed or experienced any climate-related challenges?	For example, climate change, biodiversity loss, land conversion, chemical pollution, ozone layer depletion, excessive fertiliser use, freshwater withdrawals (dams and rivers drying because of human use)

SECTION C: PRIVATE AND PUBLIC GREEN INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT A GREEN ECONOMY

Broad questions	Probing questions
What private and public green initiatives in your village/location or ward would you advocate for, to manage environmental overshoots /challenges and shortfalls in essential human needs?	Probe for opinions on sustainable practices for food, water, housing, education, healthcare, energy, income, fair treatment on resource distribution, political voice, networks Gender equality, peace and justice
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban agriculture e.g. community gardens and vertical farming • Agroecology e.g. organic farming, permaculture • Food waste reduction • Rainwater harvesting • Watershed management e.g. catchment management e.g. Reforest and catchment protection • Eco-sanitation e.g. composite toilets and eco-friendly sewer treatment system • Green homes e.g. with solar or recycled bricks • Green skill development • Eco-Schools e.g. sustainable schools • Green Clinics e.g. solar powered clinics • Urban green spaces. e.g. parks and green areas for mental health • Renewable energy e.g. solar, biogas, • Energy efficiency promotion e.g. led lighting • Green jobs e.g. in renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture. • Eco-tourism e.g. nature-based tourism projects • Green microfinance • Circular economy enterprises e.g. businesses focused on repair, reuse, and recycling • Land redistribution • Community resource governance e.g. communities co- managing forests, water, and minerals sustainably. • Green policy advocacy • Participatory governance e.g. marginalised communities in environmental decision-making. • Climate justice movements • Conflict-sensitive resource management e.g. prevent resource-based conflicts. • prevent resource-based conflicts. • Environmental justice campaigns e.g. address disparities in pollution exposure • Sustainability forums • Knowledge sharing platforms • Public-private partnerships 	

SECTION D: DIGITAL ADVOCACY

Broad questions	Probing questions
In the past 12 months how did you participate in any digital advocacy	What where you advocating for? What was the motivation? Where the issues different by gender, location etc
What are the challenges associated with digital advocacy	Probe for young women expereinces
What are the opportunities associated with digital advocacy	
Which digital platforms are normally used for advocacy?	
What are the most effective strategies for mobilising online support into real-world action?	
How do local CSOs and CBOs leverage digital technologies to mobilise support and advocate for local issues?	
What can make young people paticipate in digital platforms?	
How did you interat with the local authority through digital platform?	why did you do so? Probe for young women expereinces
How do you know your digital rights?	Probe for young women expereinces
Which digital platforms do you know that promote green economic initiatives?	
How did you received any training on digital advocacy or digital literacy?	

SECTION F: DIGITAL LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK IN ZIMBABWE

- Which legislaion in Zimbabwe that directly or indirectly governs digital rights and freedoms?
- What is the level of awareness and understanding of these laws among young women, young men, people with disabilities, Youth-led CSOs and CBOsand government officials?
- What gaps exist in digtial legislation that need to be addressed to protect digital rights and freedoms?

Online individual youth survey (OIYS) – – All youth who participated in the FGD were also invited to participate in the OIYS. Furthermore, the snowballing approach was adopted, where each focus group discussion participant was asked to identify four (4) other youths of his/her gender in their area to fill the OIYS questionnaire. Data was provided for them to upload the completed digital questionnaire onto the Kobo Collect App. Below is the questionnaire that was used for the online youth survey (OIYS).

BASELINE STUDY ON DIGITAL ADVOCACY PLATFORMS FOR YOUTH IN ZIMBABWE

Individual Peer by Peer Youth Survey (IYS)

Questionnaire

January 2025

The Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD), in partnership with SAYWHAT and Save the Children, is conducting a study on digital platform usage for youth advocacy in Zimbabwe. The study will inform a YCA4SoTra project aimed at empowering young people to utilize digital technologies to advocate for green economic opportunities and environmentally sustainable policies. The study is assessing the current landscape of digital platform uptake among Zimbabwean youth, identify challenges and opportunities, and provide recommendations for enhancing their effectiveness in promoting youth participation in governance and policy dialogue. Participation is voluntary, and without coercion. Participants can withdraw at any time without facing any penalties. Participation in the study is not associated with financial and non financial benefits currently and in the future. Filling in the questionnaire is expected to make 20 minutes. The survey is targeting youple aged 18-35.

SECTION A: RESPONDENT INFORMATION

Questions	Responses and codes
A1. District	1=Gwanda 2=Matobo 3=Lupane 4=Bulawayo
A2. Ward	
A3. Village/location	
A4. Nature of Village/location	1=Rural 2=Urban 3=Peri-urban
A5. Gender	1=Male 2=Female 3=Other
A6. Marital status	1= Married with a child or children

	2= Single 3= Single with a child or children 4=Divorced 5=Widowed
A7. Who is the household head where you live?	1=Myself 2=Parents/siblings/relative
A8. What is your level of education?	1=Primary incomplete 2=Primary 3=Secondary incomplete 4=Secondary 5=A Level 6=Tertiary
A9. Type of phone owned in the last 30 days	1=Smartphone 2=non-smartphone 3=Both 3=No phone
A10. List the social media accounts you own or have access to?	1=WhatsApp 2=Facebook 3=Instagram, 4=Twitter 5=SMS 6=Other(specify))
A11. In the last 30 days what did you use social media for?	1=Current affairs or news 2=Communication and connection 3=Education and learning 4=Entertainment and recreation 5=Self-expression and identity 6=Advocacy and activism 7=Commerce and consumerism 8=Other (Specify)
A12. What is your average monthly income in US\$?	
A13. What is your average monthly expenditure in US\$?	
A14. Monthly and on average, how much do you spend on general data to access internet in US\$?	
A15. Monthly and on average, how much do you spend on WhatsApp data data to access internet in US\$?	
A16. In the list of social media, you own or have access to, which ones do you spend most of your budget to access social media	1=WhatsApp 2=Facebook 3=Instagram, 4=Twitter

	5=SMS 6=Other(specify))
A17. How often did you access your social media accounts in the last 30 days?	1=Every hour daily 2=Daily 3=Once a week 4=At least twice a week 4= Once in 30 days 5= At least twice in 30 days
A18. What was your main source of income in the last three months?	1=Self employment 2= Formal employment 3=Remittances 4=Parent/relative at home 5=Boy friend /girlfriend 6=husband/wife 7=Not employed 8=Other

SECTION B: ESSENTIAL HUMAN NEEDS

B1. How easy is it for you to have or access the following at all times?	Ranking (1(Very difficult) to (Very easy)	State your reasons
Food		
Water		
Housing		
Education		
Healthcare		
Energy		
Income		
Fair treament on resource distribution		
Political voice		
Networks		
Gender equality		
Peace and justice		

SECTION C: ENVIRONMENTAL LIMITS

C1. How you noticed or experienced any of the folowing in your village or Ward?	Response 1=Yes 2=Not sure
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------

	3=No
Climate change	
Biodiversity loss	
Land conversion	
Chemical pollution	
Ozone layer depletion	
Excessive fertiliser use	
Freshwater withdrawals (Dams and rivers drying because of human use)	

SECTION D: PRIVATE AND PUBLIC GREEN INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT A GREEN ECONOMY

D1. In the following, which private and public green initiatives in your village/location or ward can you advocate for, to manage environmental overshoots in C1 and shortfalls in essential human needs in B1?		Tick appropriate	Is the initiative currently available? 1=Yes 2=Not sure 3=No
Food	Urban agriculture e.g. community gardens and vertical farming		
	Agroecology e.g. organic farming, permaculture		
	Food waste reduction		
Water	Rainwater harvesting		
	Watershed management e.g. catchment management e.g. Reforest and catchment protection		
	Eco-sanitation e.g. composite toilets and eco-friendly sewer treatment system		
Housing	Green homes e.g. with solar or recycled bricks		
Education	Green skill development		
	Eco-Schools e.g. sustainable schools		
Healthcare	Green Clinics e.g. solar powered clinics		
	Urban green spaces. e.g. parks and green areas for mental health		
Energy	Renewable energy e.g. solar, biogas,		
	Energy efficiency promotion e.g. led lighting		
Income	Green jobs e.g. in renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture.		
	Eco-tourism e.g. nature-based tourism projects		

	Green microfinance		
	Circular economy enterprises e.g. businesses focused on repair, reuse, and recycling		
Fair treatment on resource distribution	Land redistribution		
	Community resource governance e.g. communities co- managing forests, water, and minerals sustainably.		
Political voice	Green policy advocacy		
	Participatory governance e.g. marginalised communities in environmental decision-making.		
	Climate justice movements		
Peace and justice	Conflict-sensitive resource management e.g. prevent resource-based conflicts.		
	prevent resource-based conflicts.		
	Environmental justice campaigns e.g. address disparities in pollution exposure		
Networks	Sustainability forums		
	Knowledge sharing platforms		
	Public-private partnerships		

SECTION E: DIGITAL ADVOCACY

E1. In the past 12 months did you participate in any digital advocacy [_____] 1=yes, 2=not sure, 3=No

E2. If Yes to E1, what where you advocating for? [_____]

E3. What are the challenges associated with digital advocacy? [_____]

E4. What are the opportunities associated with digital advocacy? [_____]

E5. Which digital platforms are normally used for advocacy? [_____] 1=WhatsApp, 2=Facebook, 3=Instagram, 4=Twitter, 5=SMS, 6=websites, 7=Other (specify)

E6 What are the most effective strategies for mobilising online support into real-world action? [_____]

E6. How do local CSOs and CBOs leverage digital technologies to mobilise support and advocate for local issues? [_____]

E7. What can make young people participate in digital platforms? [_____]

E8. Have you interacted with the local authority through digital platform? [_____] 1=yes, 2=not sure, 3=No

E9. If Yes to E8, why did you do so? [_____]

E10. Have you received any training on digital advocacy? [_____] 1=yes, 2=not sure, 3=No

E11. Have you interacted with any political or traditional leader through digital platforms?
[.....] 1=yes, 2=not sure, 3=No

E12. If Yes to E8, why did you do so? [.....]

E13. Do you know your digital rights? [.....] 1=yes, 2=not sure, 3=No

E14. Do you know any digital platforms that promote green economic initiatives?
[.....] 1=yes, 2=not sure, 3=No

E12. If Yes to E14, list the platforms? [.....]

SECTION F: DIGITAL LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK IN ZIMBABWE

F1: Which legislation in Zimbabwe that directly or indirectly governs digital rights and freedoms?
[.....]

F2. What is the level of awareness and understanding of these laws among young women, young men, people with disabilities, Youth-led CSOs and CBOs and government officials? [.....] 1=Low to 5(High)

F3. What gaps exist in digital legislation that need to be addressed to protect digital rights and freedoms? [.....]

Key informant interviews (KII) – Twelve (12) KIIs were conducted with purposively sampled, that is, two (2) youth-led CSOs/CBOs – focusing on digital technology promotion and information access, one (1) community journalist, four (4) elected councilors, one (1) youth activist and four (4) local government officials focusing on youth empowerment, women affairs and enterprise development and social welfare. Three KIIs were conducted per district, depending on the availability of the target KIIs per each category. Stakeholders were identified by WILD local partners, and the stakeholders were persons already working with local partners in the project. During the KIIs one researcher focused on interviewing the key informant whilst the other two researchers took notes. Below is the KII guide.

BASELINE STUDY ON DIGITAL ADVOCACY PLATFORMS FOR YOUTH IN ZIMBABWE

Key Informant Interview Guide

January 2025

The Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD), in partnership with SAYWHAT and Save the Children, is conducting a study on digital platform usage for

youth advocacy in Zimbabwe. The study will inform a YCA4SoTra project aimed at empowering young people to utilize digital technologies to advocate for green economic opportunities and environmentally sustainable policies. The study is assessing the current landscape of digital platform uptake among Zimbabwean youth, identify challenges and opportunities, and provide recommendations for enhancing their effectiveness in promoting youth participation in governance and policy dialogue. Participation is voluntary, and without coercion. Participants can withdraw at any time without facing any penalties. Participation in the study is not associated with financial and non-financial benefits currently and in the future.

SECTION A: RESPONDENT INFORMATION

Questions	Responses and codes
A1. District	1=Gwanda 2=Matobo 3=Lupane 4=Bulawayo
A2. Organization represented	
A3. Role/position within the organization	
A4. Gender	1=Male 2=Female 3=Other

SECTION B: INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES/INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT A GREEN ECONOMY

1. Is your organization currently supporting any opportunities or initiatives to support a green economy? Probe for a description of the nature of these initiatives, what these initiatives entail, target populations
2. Aside from the initiative you are directly involved in, are you aware of any green opportunities available within the district? Probe further as to the nature, accessibility for different target groups,
3. Are you aware of any challenges that exist in terms of accessing and implementing green economy opportunities in the district? Probe for detail

SECTION C: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

1. In your various interventions to what extent do you engage with the youth as a target audience? Probe respondent on whether they directly engage youth as a unique separate, target group; do they focus on diverse characteristics of youth (sex, disability, education etc.) or engage them as a homogenous group
2. What platforms do you use for the engagement of youth?
3. What are the key engagement issues focused on? Probe to ascertain the extent to which green economy and sustainable environmental issues are addressed
4. To what extent do your engagements support advocacy on various issues?

5. Are the platforms used for youth engagement different from the platforms used to engage with other groups? Why or why not?
6. Are there any opportunities/challenges you have observed/noted with regards singling out the youth for engagement? Probe further to ascertain whether these challenges affect all youth or there are differential effects depending on the youth diversity

SECTION D: DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND ADVOCACY

1. What digital platforms do you make use of in your day-to-day operations? Probe to find out the type of platforms and their use
2. To what extent do you believe all members of the community have access to and can make use of these digital platforms? Probe to identify any differential access, challenges/opportunities, freedom/rights
3. How active is youth participation on these digital platforms? Probe to establish whether youth are more active than other target groups, whether youth are more active on the digital platforms than other platforms
4. Do you make use of any of these digital platforms for advocacy engagements? Probe further on what advocacy issues
5. How do you support the actioning on issues raised through these platforms? Probe further on issues of feedback mechanisms, linkages with other non-digital engagement platforms
6. Are there any opportunities/challenges you have observed/noted with regards digital advocacy?

SECTION F: DIGITAL LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK IN ZIMBABWE

1. Which legislative instruments are you aware of in Zimbabwe that directly or indirectly govern digital rights and freedoms?
2. To what extent would you say there is awareness and understanding of these legislative instruments among different the stakeholders you engage with? Probe on understanding and awareness among young women, young men, people with disabilities, Youth-led CSOs and CBOs and government officials?
3. How do you think the level of understanding and awareness of digital legislation influences/affects your digital advocacy initiatives?
4. Have you noted any gaps in the digital legislation that may need to be addressed to protect digital rights and freedoms?

1.8. Data analysis/ Analytical approach

The baseline study used content analysis approach to analyse the qualitative data collected from KII and FGDs. Using the approach central themes were identified using NVivo and then triangulated with quantitative data from the individual youth online survey. Quantitative data was collected using Kobo Collect and then downloaded into Excel and subsequently uploaded into SPSS for analysis. Percentages and means were

generated to analyze the data, derive insights, and establish baseline information for reporting. Bar graphs were created to visually present the findings, ensuring clarity and enhancing the interpretation of the data in this final report.

1.9. Ethical consideration

Baseline study participants were aged 18- 35 years. The age range was selected to focus on young women and men, capturing their perspectives, behaviors, and experiences related to digital technology use and advocacy. During data collection, the researchers were guided by WILD, consortium partners and their local partners to ensure adherence to the relevant local protocols. In general, the baseline study adhered to the following ethical considerations:

- **Informed consent:** Participants were provided with clear and comprehensive information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. They were also given the opportunity to freely consent or decline to participate.
- **Privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality:** Participants' privacy was protected throughout the study. Anonymity was maintained by ensuring that personal identifiers were not collected or disclosed. Confidentiality was upheld by safeguarding the collected data and preventing unauthorized access.
- **Voluntary participation:** Participation was voluntary, without coercion. Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without facing any penalties.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** The study endeavored to respect local traditions, norms and values. The baseline study team engaged with the communities in a culturally appropriate manner, considering local perspectives and this was an integral part of the study design.



Baseline findings

This section presents the results of the baseline findings. This section provides the surveyed 107 youth demographics, digital engagement, and environmental awareness, highlighting key insights into their interactions with digital platforms and local authorities. The findings were organized into thematic categories, reflecting youths' marital status, education levels, household structures, access to digital technologies, and other related baseline information.

1.10. Location and gender of respondents

In terms of location, the majority of the surveyed youth (61.7%) resided in urban areas, followed by 27.1% in rural settings, and only 11.2% in peri-urban environments as shown in Table 2 . Additionally, the majority of the surveyed youth were more female (60%) than male (40%). This representation highlighted the study's efforts to include young women voices in the collected data. In the country, there are more females than males, but females, especially young women and girls, shy away from community discussions or activities. The same applies to people living with disabilities, whose participation and well-being are often safeguarded by their caregivers at all times. According to Focus Group Discussions (FGD), the participation of women, including girls or young women as well as people living with disabilities (PWD) in any advocacy activities, was notably limited and often influenced by cultural norms and societal expectations. In traditional Kalanga culture, for example, women were primarily viewed as caregivers responsible for household chores, which restricted their engagement in broader community discussions. While organizations that empower women facilitate their involvement, many still face significant barriers.

Table 2: Gender and nature of location of online survey participants

	Percentage (%)
Nature of location	
Peri-urban	11.2
Rural	27.1
Urban	61.7
Gender	
Female	60
Male	40

1.11. Marital status

The results presented in Figure 2 illustrate the marital status of the surveyed youths, revealing significant trends in their relationships. The majority of the surveyed youth (64.49%) were single, while 23.36% were single with children, highlighting a significant proportion of single-parent youth. A smaller percentage (10.28%) were married with children, and only 1.87% were divorced. These findings suggest that most youths were not in marital relationships, with a notable share balancing singlehood and parenting. The low proportions of married and divorced youths reflected social or economic factors influencing relationship dynamics in this demographic group. According to FGDs, single youth mothers are common in rural areas and face a myriad of challenges, primarily stemming from financial instability and their young age, leaving them ill-prepared for the demands of parenting. Many single mothers in these settings raised children fathered by elderly married men, contract workers (including Chinese nationals), fellow youths, or individuals visiting those areas for events such as independence celebrations. Cultural dynamics, such as illegal miners taking pride in fathering multiple children, further contribute to the prevalence of single parenthood. Cohabitation and casual relationships, including "contract relationships" or "booty calls," were common among urban youth, while many young men remained single but maintained multiple girlfriends. This pattern, coupled with widespread unemployment, underscores the need for targeted interventions to support single youth parents and address the socio-economic factors driving this trend. One youth said:

"Economy is affecting relationships; we delay in getting into marriages because we don't have money. Unemployment is leading to the death of many youths as they engage in relationships for the wrong reasons." Youth FGD participant.

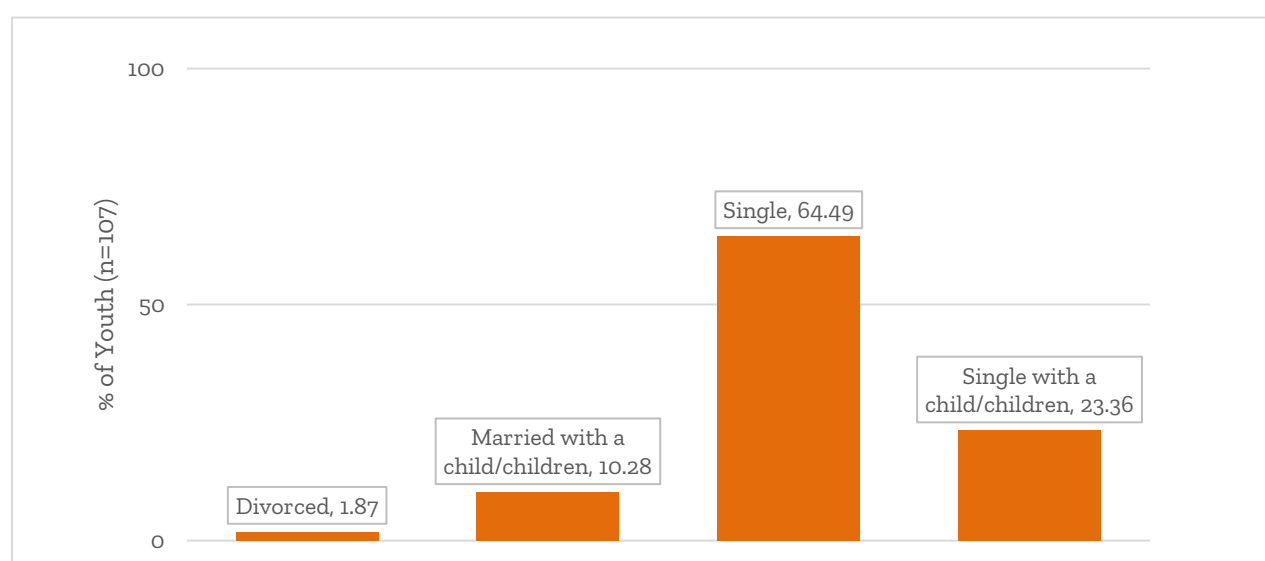


Figure 2: Youth marital status

1.12. Household structures of youth

The household structure of the youth is shown in Figure 3. The majority (60.8%) lived with parents, siblings, or other relatives, reflecting dependence on family support systems. A significant proportion (34.6%) lived alone, indicating a level of autonomy among some youth despite potential financial or social challenges. Only 4.7% of the youth lived with a spouse, which aligns with the low percentage of married youth observed in the sampled population. These patterns highlight family based living arrangements among youth, with relatively few transitioning into spousal households or fully independent living. According to youth focus group discussions, most youths stay with their families in rural areas but rent out alone in urban areas, especially for those who would have migrated from rural areas to urban areas in search of better economic prospects and those from other towns or cities working or at schools away from their hometowns or cities.

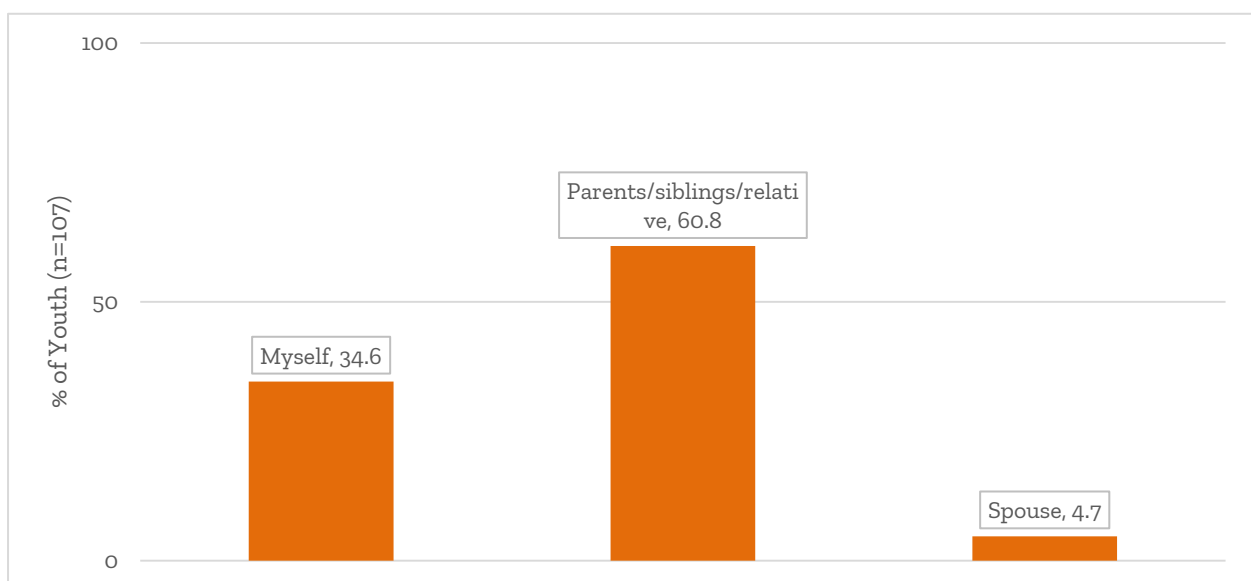


Figure 3: Household structure of youth

1.13. Education

The educational attainment of the surveyed youths is shown in Figure 4. The highest percentage (50.47%) completed tertiary education, 28.04% completed secondary education, and a lower percentage (14.02%) attained A-level education. A small number of youths had completed primary education (0.93%), and an even smaller percentage (0.93%) had not completed primary education. The majority of the youth who participated in the study achieved a relatively high level of education. All the youth who

either completed or did not complete primary education (1.86%) were exclusively from rural areas.

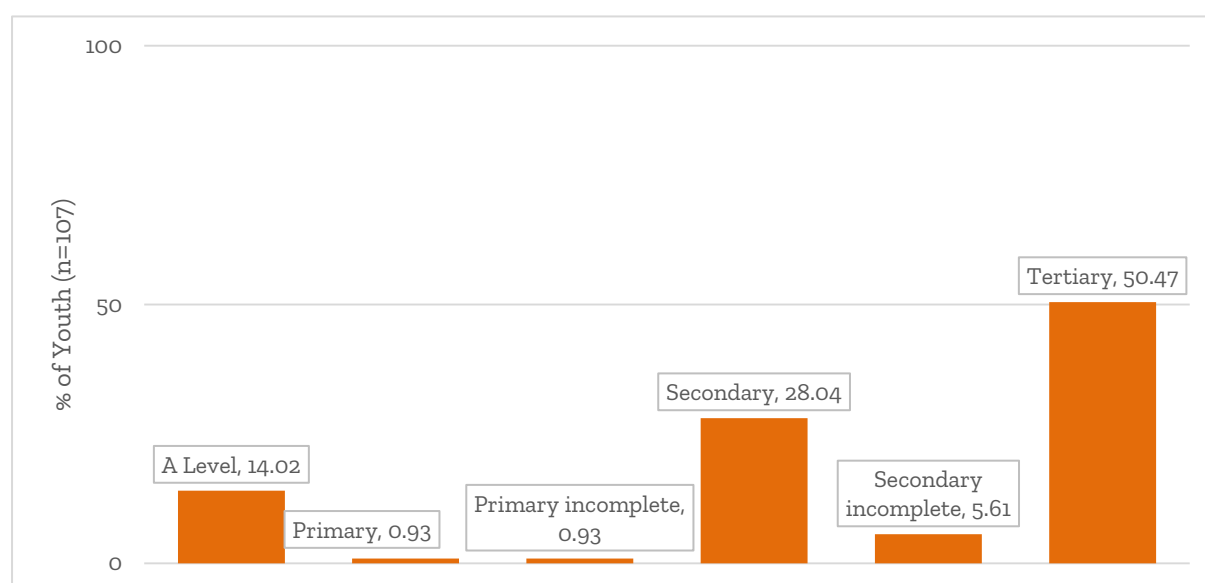


Figure 4: Education

1.14. Type of phone owned

The majority of the surveyed youth (87.85%) owned a smartphone, as shown in Figure 5, indicating high digital connectivity in the sample. A small proportion (4.67%) owned a non-smartphone, while 4.67% had access to both types of phones. Notably, 2.8% of the youths did not own a phone, highlighting a minimal lack of mobile access. These findings suggest that smartphones are the primary communication tool among the youth, reflecting the importance of mobile technology for social and economic engagement in the demographic group. Further data analysis (disaggregation by gender) revealed distinct gender disparities in phone ownership among the surveyed youth. All individuals without a phone were female, highlighting a gap in access to basic communication tools. Additionally, the majority (80%) of those with non-smartphones were female, further highlighting gender imbalance in access to more advanced digital devices. In terms of smartphones, males accounting for 55% of smartphone owners while majority (62.8%) of smartphone owners were from urban areas (disaggregation by location). These findings suggested that gender played a critical role in determining access to digital technologies, with females and those from rural areas facing greater barriers to owning smartphones.

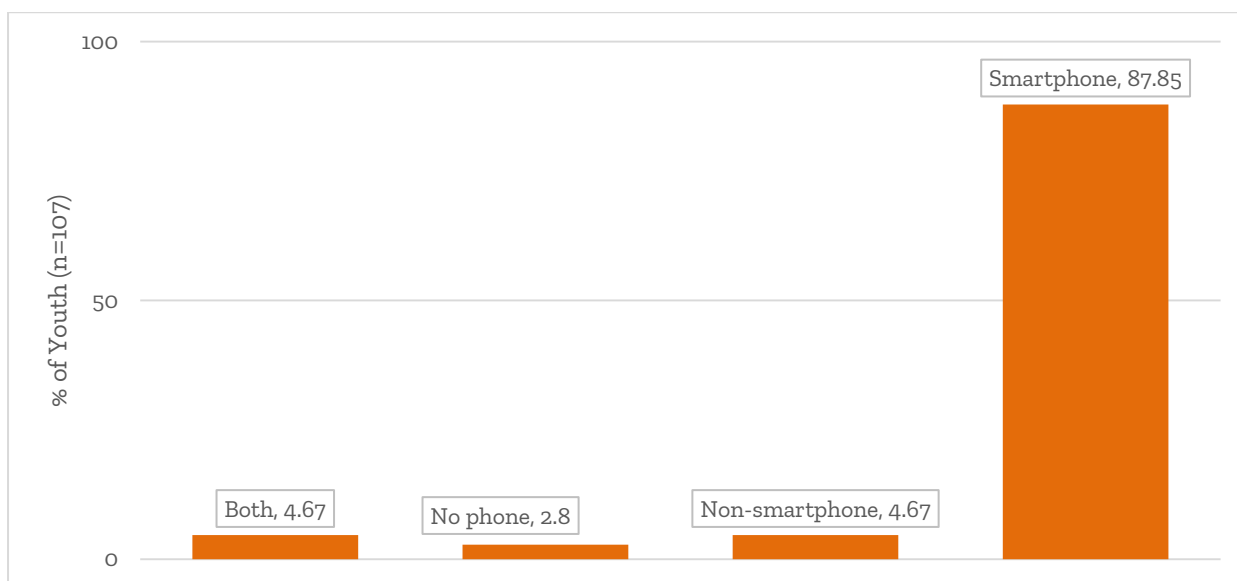


Figure 5: Type of phone owned

1.15. Social media accounts owned

Figure 6 illustrates social media usage among the surveyed youth, revealing notable preferences for various platforms. Remarkably, 96% of the surveyed youth utilized WhatsApp, making it the most popular platform for communication and interaction among youth. Facebook followed closely at 71%, indicating its continued relevance despite the rise of new platforms. TikTok (57%) and Instagram (48%) also demonstrated significant engagement, particularly among those who favored visual and short-form content. Conversely, the Twitter usage rate was low at 31%, while LinkedIn was the least utilized platform, with only 11% of youths engaging with it. This disparity suggests that while youth were heavily invested in social media for social interactions, there was a lack of interest in professional networking platforms, highlighting a potential area for growth in promoting career development and professional opportunities. The other platform used by youth for security reasons was a signal. When the data was disaggregated by gender, social media accounts were largely owned by male youth, with over 50% ownership compared to their female counterparts. Overall, the findings indicate the importance of leveraging popular platforms, such as WhatsApp and Facebook, for outreach and engagement initiatives targeting youth, especially young women.

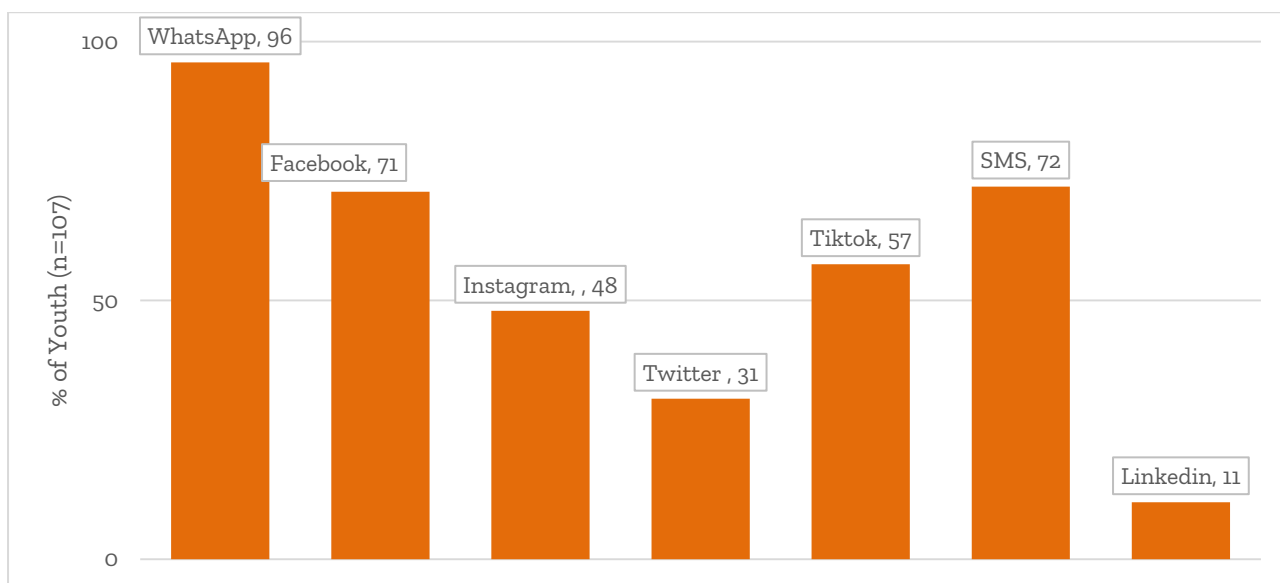


Figure 6: Social media accounts owned

1.16. Social media use

Focus group discussions revealed a multifaceted engagement with digital platforms among the surveyed youth, primarily for entertainment and social connections. Activities such as posting pictures and having fun dominated their online interactions, highlighting a strong inclination towards visual content and leisure. Platforms such as TikTok and Facebook served as key spaces for youth to share experiences related to family, love, and friendships. The conversations also encompassed significant themes, such as climate change, farming, and education, indicating that while entertainment was a primary driver, there was also considerable interest in addressing pressing societal issues and personal development. This mix of light-hearted engagement and serious topics suggested that youth were using social media as a tool for both escapism and meaningful discourse. While escapism can be a healthy way to relax and cope with stress in moderation, excessive reliance on it can lead to the avoidance of responsibilities, emotional challenges, or personal growth.

Additionally, the discussions highlighted a variety of challenges faced by youth, including job hunting, financial stress, and educational pressures. The mention of topics such as heartbreak, family problems, and climate-related issues reflected the complexities of their lived experiences. The diverse array of subjects—ranging from sports and hobbies to deeper concerns about infrastructure and politics—indicated that social media served not only as a platform for connection but also as a space for youth to navigate their realities and seek support. This duality highlighted the importance of creating digital environments that catered to both entertainment needs and serious discussions relevant to their lives, fostering a holistic approach to youth

engagement in the digital age. Figure 7 shows the social media use of the 107 surveyed individual youth.

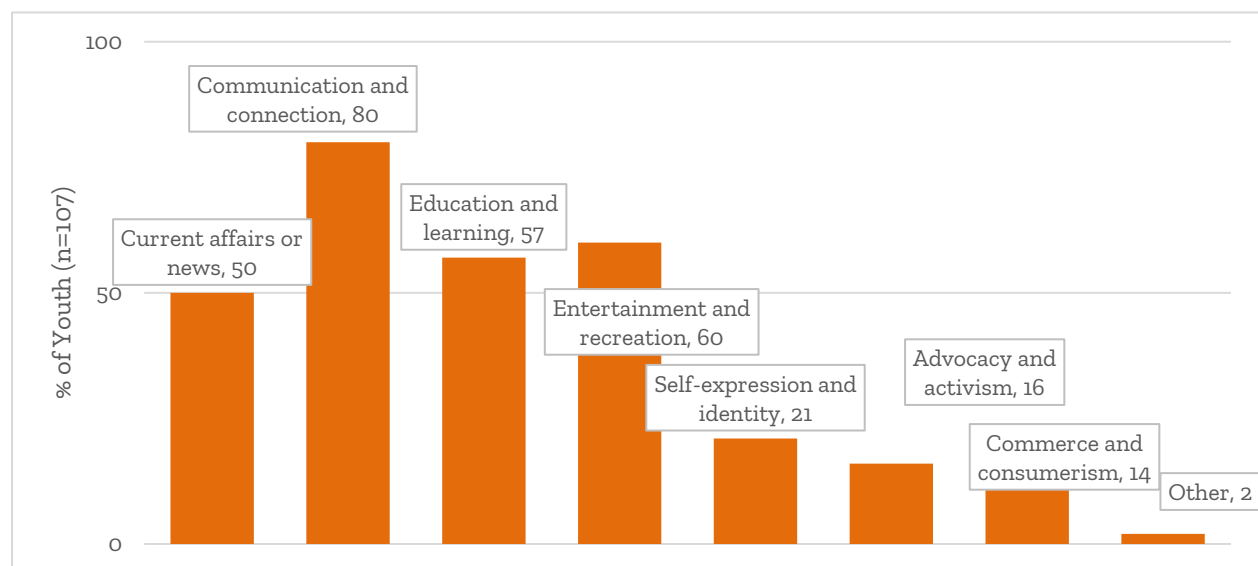


Figure 7: Social media use

According to FGDs, social media presents numerous challenges, particularly for youth, including issues such as cyberbullying, lack of privacy, and pressure to conform to online norms. Platforms such as Twitter, known for their unregulated freedom of speech, fostered aggression, whereas Facebook was often perceived as outdated and unappealing to younger audiences. The high cost of data, limited connectivity, and financial constraints restrict access to these platforms. Additionally, misinformation, peer pressure, and the fear of expressing oneself due to the potential consequences of security forces contributed to a climate of fear and caution. The misuse of social media has also had tragic consequences, such as youth suicides linked to online pressure. The lack of safety on digital platforms makes them unreliable for lobbying and advocacy, with hacking and exposure of personal information to users' concerns. These challenges highlight the need for secure, affordable, and supportive digital environments. One Key Informant said:

"Youths fear to express themselves whether on social media or physically as they query freedom after expression. There is no safety even in the digital platforms. Fear is not with stakeholders but the security forces. Digital platforms are now a challenge for lobbying as they have limitations of safety hence the digital content tells you a lot about your security."
Community Journalist – Key Informant.

One youth FGD participant said:

"We have benefited from social media but in November to December 2024, in Pumula I witnessed the death of 4 male youths who misused the social media and committed suicide after scrolling on their girlfriends' WhatsApp." Youth FGD participant.

1.17. Social media accounts access frequency

The frequency of social media account access among the sample of youth (n=107) is depicted in Figure 8. The graph reveals that a substantial proportion of the youth accessed their social media accounts daily (64.5%), with a notable number checking them every hour (23.4%). A smaller percentage accessed their accounts at least twice a week (2.8%) and once a week (7.5%). The least frequent access was reported at least twice in 30 days (0.9%) or once in 30 days (0.9%). When the data was disaggregated by gender, notable differences in social media access frequency were observed between genders. Among individuals who accessed social media at least twice a week, the majority were females (66.7%). This trend was similar for those who accessed social media at least once a week, 62.50% were also female youth. Among individuals who accessed social media daily and every hour daily, the majority were males, 50.72% and 60% respectively, suggesting that male youth access social media more frequently than their female counterparts. Overall, while both genders were active on social media, the frequency and patterns of usage was different, with males tending to engage more frequently on a daily basis. Overall, these findings suggested that social media was highly integrated into the daily lives of the youth in the study areas.

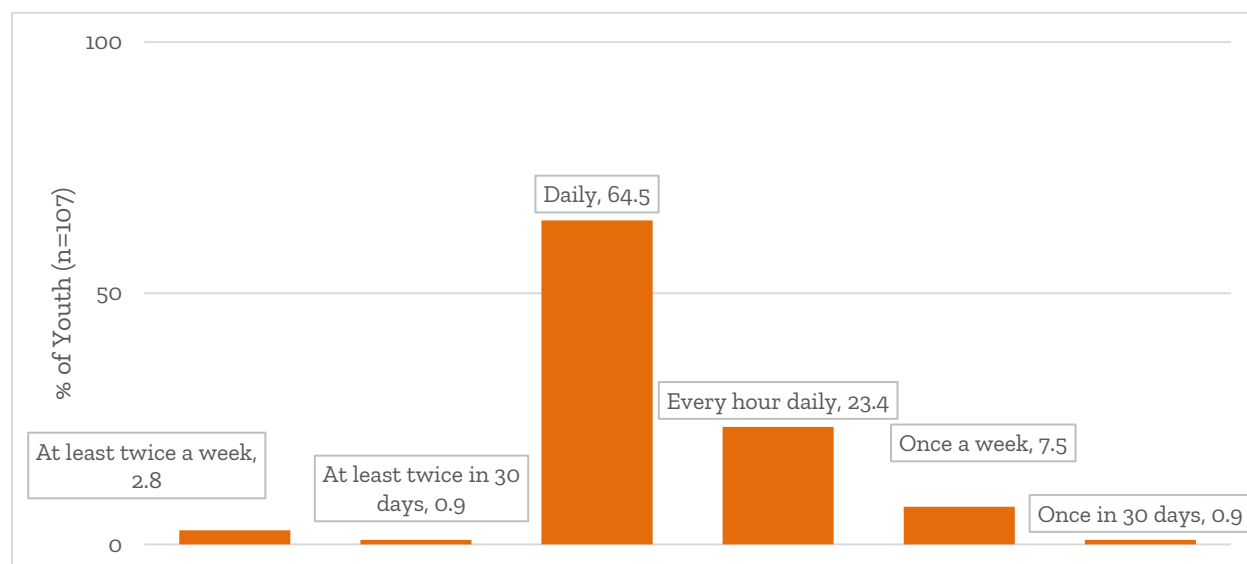


Figure 8: Social media accounts access frequency

1.18. Youth income and data budget

Statistics on the average monthly income and expenditure, as well as spending on the Internet and WhatsApp, for the surveyed youth are presented in Table 3 and disaggregated by gender. On average, the monthly income was US\$107 but with a high standard deviation, indicating a wide range of incomes among youth. Similarly, the average monthly expenditure was US\$107, again with a standard deviation, suggesting a significant variability in spending habits. Regarding Internet access, the average monthly spending on general data was US\$14.2, while the average for WhatsApp data was US\$8.0. Both had relatively low standard deviations, implying that spending on these services was less variable than income and overall expenditure. When the data was disaggregated by gender, females had less values compared to their male counterpart. These findings suggested that female youth faced financial constraints that limited their ability to invest in internet access and digital communication tools, potentially hindering their participation in digital spaces and opportunities for advocacy or connectivity. In summary, the data showed a diverse range of income and expenditure levels among the sample, with a substantial portion of the budget allocated to Internet and WhatsApp data usage.

Table 3: Youth income and data budget

	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Average monthly income in US\$? (All)	125.2	142.3	0	900
Male	155	162.6	0	900
Female	93.8	110.2	0	500
Average monthly expenditure in US\$ (All)	118.3	138.8	0	900
Male	139	147.5	0	900
Female	96.5	126.8	0	700
Average amount spent monthly on general data to access the internet in US\$ (All)	14.2	13.4	0	100
Male	14.7	10.8	1	50
Female	13.7	15.8	0	100
Average, amount spent monthly on WhatsApp data in US\$(All)	8.0	7.3	0	50
Male	8.1	8.2	2	50
Female	7.8	6.2	0	30

1.19. Social media accounts consuming most data budget

Figure 9 illustrates the social media platforms that consume the most data budgets among the youth (n=107). WhatsApp dominated, accounting for 66.36% of the total,

indicating its primary role in communication and engagement. Facebook accounted for 13.08%, whereas TikTok accounted for 10.28%, reflecting its growing popularity despite its high data usage. Smaller proportions were attributed to SMS (4.67%), Instagram (2.8%), X (formerly Twitter) (1.87%), and YouTube (0.93%), which likely consumed less data owing to lower engagement or specific usage patterns. These findings highlight WhatsApp's dominance in usage and data consumption, with emerging platforms such as TikTok playing a notable but secondary role.

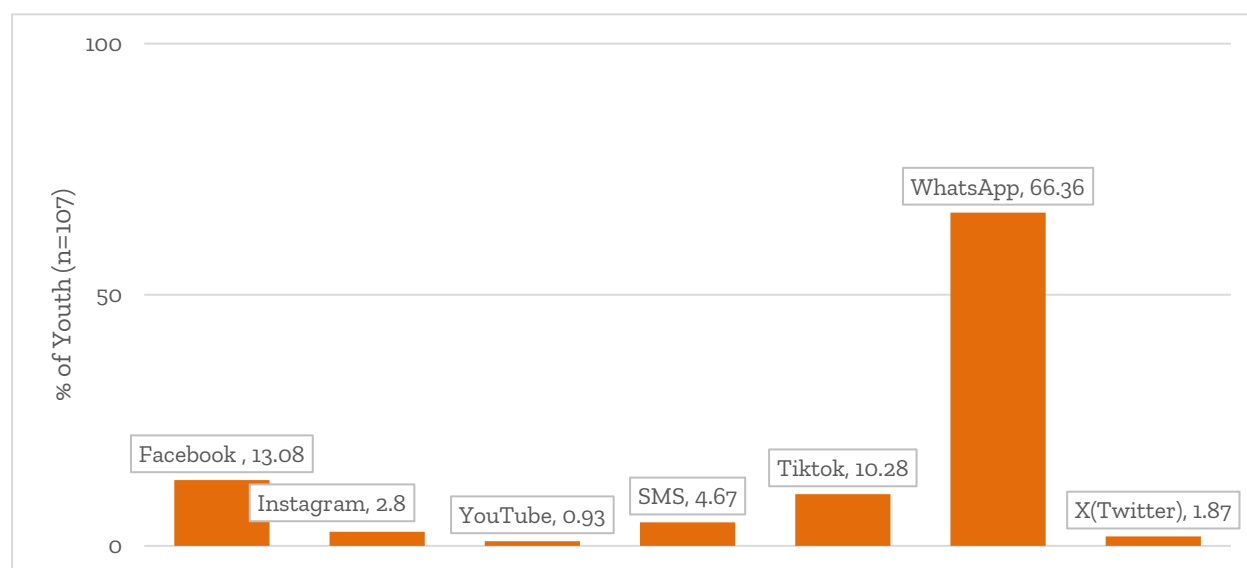


Figure 9: Social media accounts consuming most data budget

1.20. Main source of income

The main sources of income for youth (n=107) are shown in Figure 10. The majority (48.6%) derived their income from self-employment, reflecting reliance on entrepreneurial activities. Formal employment accounted for 21.5%, while 16.82% depended on financial support from their parents or relatives at home. A smaller portion (5.61%) reported being unemployed and receiving no income and 2.8% relied on remittances. Other sources (2.8%) included child support funds and volunteering, while minimal percentages depended on boyfriends/girlfriends (0.93%) or husbands/wives (0.93%). When the data was disaggregated by gender, the youths whose main source of income was formal employment, the majority (69.6%) were males. The same applied to those youths who gained income through self-employment, the majority (51.9%) were males. Conversely, the surveyed youth who received income from "husband/wife", "parent/relative at home", and those without income, the majority were females (100%, 77.8 and 66.7% respectively). Additionally, formal employment was mainly in urban areas while self-employment also existed in rural areas. These findings highlight the critical role of self-employment as a primary income source, likely driven by limited access to formal employment opportunities.



Figure 10: Main source of income for youth

According to FGDs and Key informant interviews (KII), youth self-employ by selling airtime, brick molding, selling and repairing phones, baking cakes, and commercial sex. Depending on their level of education, some were employed as herd boys, house maids, shop attendants, consultants, research assistants, chefs, waiters, taxi drivers, and brand ambassadors. Others engage in illegal activities, such as selling drugs, stealing, and illegal mining.

1.21. Youth access to essential human needs

Doughnut Economics posits that a just and sustainable society exists within a "safe and just space" – a space where basic human needs are met for all (the "social foundation") without overshooting the Earth's ecological ceiling. Figure 11 shows youth's access to essential human needs. Political voice (53.1%), income (55.1%), and fair distribution of resources (61.7%) were perceived as difficult for the majority of the surveyed youth to access. These challenges were systemic barriers that inhibited youth from fully participating in society and achieving economic stability, which is crucial for fostering a sustainable and equitable future. Interestingly, despite the critical importance of basic needs, both water (11.2%) and food (24.3%) were easily accessible, which may be surprising given their fundamental roles in human survival. This discrepancy suggested that while access to these essentials may be relatively easier, broader systemic issues affecting income and political engagement remained notable barriers to achieving a balanced and thriving society.

According to Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KII), youth faced multifaceted challenges in their local communities. Many youths struggled

with unstable electricity, which hampered their ability to run online businesses, leading to financial losses. Power outages were common, with electricity often restored only at midnight, posing safety concerns for students and the surrounding communities. Additionally, while some youth aspired to adopt solar solutions, the high costs remained prohibitive. The economic environment exacerbated these issues, as many young people resorted to illegal side hustles and faced exploitation by potential employers. Unemployment loomed large, with meager salaries (US\$50-\$80 for shopkeeper) often failing to meet basic needs, forcing youth to engage in various precarious jobs to survive. Two youths said:

"Little wages are not helping us as youths as we work in the shops getting \$50/\$60 per month". Youth FGD participant.

"No employment and if employed you get peanuts as salary e.g. working at a salon and getting R1000 per month and paying a rent of R500 and the remaining R500 does not meet the basic needs". Youth FGD participant.

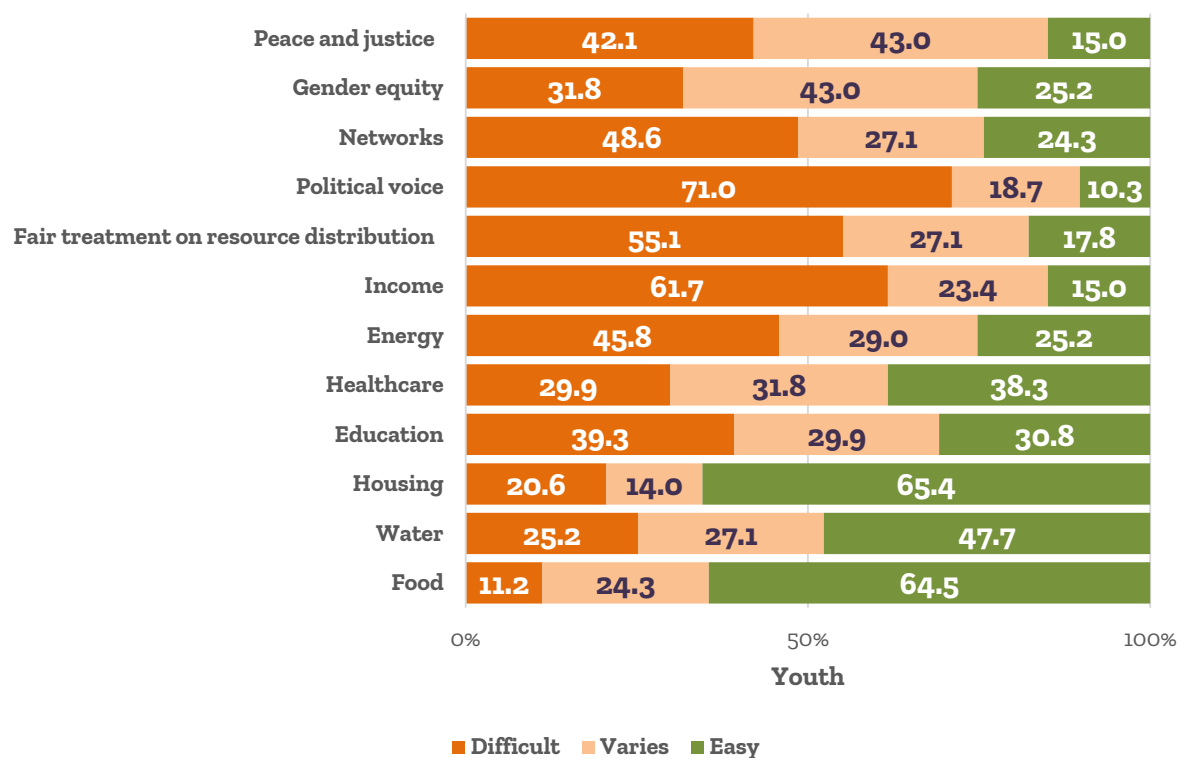


Figure 11: Youth access to essential human needs

One KII said:

"We have banks like Empower Bank, Stanbic, CABS and NBS which give youths loans to boost their businesses. The youths say they don't get the loans but it's not true, there is a lot of assessment before one gets the loan and the youths don't want that. We always tell the youths that they should take what they can but they don't want to start small." Youth key informant – Government official

In terms of gender equality, council consultative meetings often lacked gender sensitivity, as they were frequently scheduled during times when women were expected to be at home preparing meals, typically between 1600hrs and 1700hrs, and often run until 2000hrs. This timing disproportionately affected women, forcing them to leave early to attend to household responsibilities, thereby limiting their participation in decision-making processes within local authorities. Furthermore, even in leadership roles that are filled through elections, women candidates with the requisite qualifications were often overlooked in favor of male candidates, sometimes despite the majority of voters being women. This bias was further compounded by the fact that government departments, such as the Minister of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MWACSMED), which advocated for women's interests and empowerment, were often led by male office bearers who may not fully understand or prioritize women's perspectives. This lack of representation and understanding directly impacted service delivery, particularly for women. In Zimbabwe, a patriarchal society, cultural norms often perpetuated the undervaluing of women, with males frequently failing to respect females, further entrenching gender inequality and hindering progress toward equitable participation and representation. One female youth said:

"I was nominated to be a chairperson and was being voted for with 2 males. I had the qualifications and the group that was voting was full of females but they didn't vote for me but males instead". Youth FGD female participant

Youths, particularly young women, faced barriers in accessing healthcare and participating in decision-making processes, and often felt marginalized and underserved. During FGDs they reported a lack of tailored programmes and services that address their specific needs, such as access to contraceptives, family planning, and prenatal and postnatal care. Compounding these challenges, young women often walked long distances to reach healthcare facilities, and even then, many essential services were not provided free of charge. Additionally, youths frequently experienced ill-treatment at healthcare centres and government agencies, further discouraging them from seeking the care and support they needed. These systemic issues highlighted the urgent need for youth-friendly, affordable, and accessible healthcare

services, as well as inclusive policies that actively involved young people in shaping the programmes designed to serve them.

Moreover, there was a notable absence of networking platforms for business and career growth. While banks offered loans, bureaucratic hurdles deterred many youths from applying. In terms of political voice, a pervasive fear of victimization stifled political expression, leaving young people feeling disempowered and unheard. Regarding access to water, youths in rural areas often walked long distances to fetch water for their households, as boreholes were located far away, while in urban areas, frequent water cuts were a common issue. In the context of doughnut economics, these challenges highlight the urgent need for policies that not only ensure basic needs are met but also facilitated equitable access to resources and empowered youth. Such measures would promote a more just, sustainable, and localized green economy.

1.22. Environmental problems

Critical environmental concerns through the lens of doughnut economics existing in the surveyed areas, as mentioned by the youth, are shown in Figure 12. The majority of the surveyed youths (70.1%) expressed awareness of the challenges of freshwater withdrawals (or water shortages/limited access), highlighting the urgent need for sustainable water management practices. Additionally, land use conversion was another notable (changing the purpose of a piece of land, such as converting forests to farmland or natural habitats to urban areas or mining sites, which is considered a key ecological boundary) concern with 65.4% recognizing the problem and its detrimental impact on ecosystems and biodiversity, which was further noted by 57% of youth who acknowledged noticing biodiversity loss in their communities. The biggest environmental problem was climate change (91.6%), and its widespread mention reflected a consciousness among youth about the challenge and its impact on their daily lives.

According to FGDs and KIIs, the survey districts faced a range of pressing environmental challenges, particularly increased heat temperatures, erratic rainfall patterns, and declining water availability. Zimbabwe relies largely on hydro-energy for energy needs, and when rain is limited, the country resorts to power cuts to manage energy demand. These challenges were exacerbated by deforestation and illegal mining activities that contaminated water sources with harmful chemicals such as cyanide. Furthermore, the inconsistency in weather patterns complicates planning for agricultural activities, resulting in delayed farming seasons and diminished yields. Women in rural areas used water from dams to irrigate their nutrition gardens, and the dams dried up this year and were affected. As dams and rivers dry, livestock get stuck in mud and die. The local delicacy, mopane worms (*Amacimbi*) are no longer present due to the late commencement of the rains in some areas. Human-wildlife conflict was now high, as encroachment on wildlife habitats drove animals, such as lions, closer to human settlements for food and water. With all this happening, it was

noted that Zimbabwe was not yet adequately prepared for meaningful conversations or actions on the above-mentioned issues. Youth participation was hindered by a lack of funding and restrictive policies, while decision-making remained dominated by adults in policymaking offices, leaving young people's interests marginalized. A major gap exists in awareness and understanding of climate change, particularly among rural communities, where climate change issues are misunderstood. The absence of investments and initiatives to support adaptation and mitigation efforts exacerbates this problem. One key informant said:

"Zimbabwe is not ready for any of the climate change conversations. Youth interests stop when they don't get funding or there is an inhibiting policy. Policy makers' offices are run by adults. We need digital climate change advocacy, Creating awareness on digitalization."
Youth Key Informant – Youth led CBO.

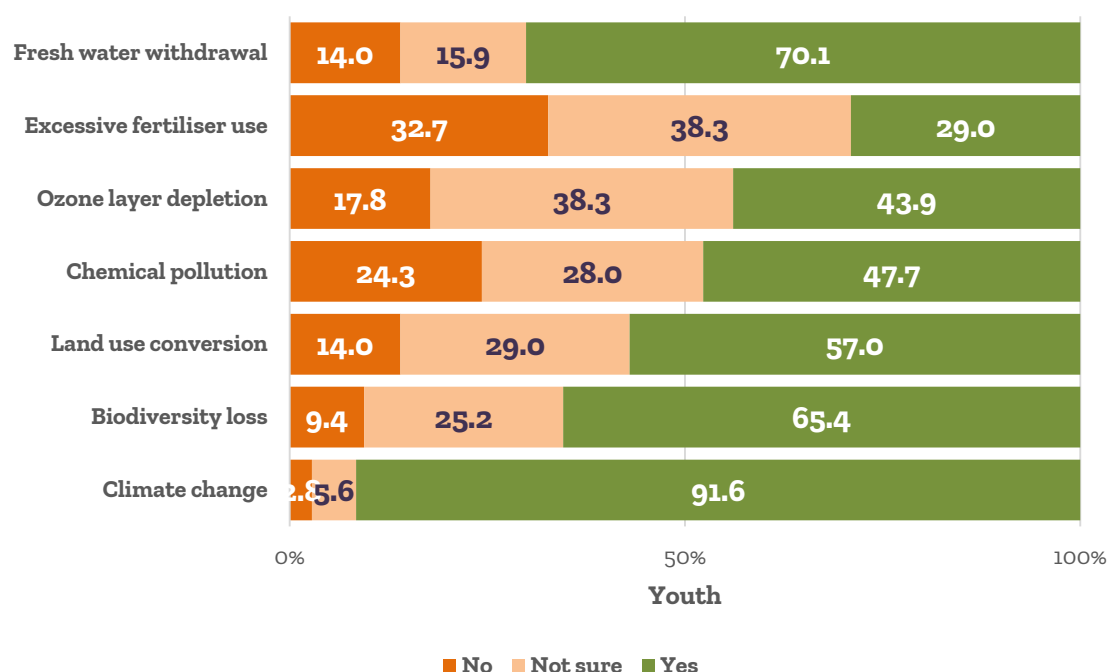


Figure 12: Environmental problems

1.23. Private and public green investment opportunities to support a localized green economy

The surveyed youth highlighted various green initiatives that they could advocate to build their local green economy and respond to human needs and environmental problems they faced, as shown in Table 4. Urban agriculture, including community gardens and vertical farming, was the most preferred green initiative among the surveyed youth (69%). This indicates a youth desire for sustainable food production within their urban settings. Rainwater harvesting followed closely at 62%, reflecting their awareness of the need for efficient water-management practices.

Further analysis revealed distinct priorities for youths when disaggregated by location and gender. In urban areas, urban agriculture (70%) and rainwater harvesting (59%) was what urban youth would advocate for. In rural areas, rainwater harvesting (69%) was what rural youth would advocate for, followed by urban agriculture (62%), highlighting the critical importance of water access and their desire to be close to markets. Youths in peri-urban areas would advocate for urban agriculture (83%), alongside green homes (67%) and rainwater harvesting (58%), indicating a focus on sustainable living and resource management. Additionally, peri-urban youth highlighted green jobs (58%), knowledge-sharing platforms (50%), and green clinics (50%), suggesting a broader interest in economic and social sustainability.

When data were analyzed by gender, both females and males prioritized urban agriculture (65% and 73%, respectively) and rainwater harvesting (58% and 65%), but females further showed interest in knowledge-sharing platforms (52%) and green jobs (50%), reflecting their desire for empowerment and economic opportunities. Males, on the other hand, exhibited slightly higher support for urban agriculture and rainwater harvesting. Other green initiatives that they can advocate for private and public green investment initiatives are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Private and public green investment opportunities

Green initiatives to be advocated for	% of all youth
Urban agriculture e.g. community gardens and vertical farming	69
Rainwater harvesting	62
Knowledge sharing platforms	46
Renewable energy e.g. solar, biogas	44
Green homes e.g. with solar or recycled bricks	40
Green clinics e.g. solar powered clinics	38
Green jobs e.g. in renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture	38
Food waste reduction	36
Eco-schools e.g. sustainable schools	34
Agro-ecology e.g. organic farming, permaculture	33
Green skills development	32
Urban green spaces. e.g. parks and green areas for mental health	31
Watershed/catchment management e.g. reforestation and catchment protection	29
Climate justice movements	29

Eco-sanitation e.g. composite toilets and eco-friendly sewer treatment systems	25
Public-private partnerships	25
Environmental justice campaigns e.g. addressing disparities in pollution exposure	24
Circular economy enterprises e.g. businesses focused on repair, reuse, and recycling	23
Green policy advocacy	23
Sustainability forums	23
Land redistribution	22
Participatory governance e.g. marginalized communities in environmental decision-making.	22
Energy efficiency promotion e.g. LED lighting	21
Eco-tourism e.g. nature-based tourism projects	19
Community resource governance e.g. communities co-managing forests, water, and minerals sustainably	19
Conflict-sensitive resource management e.g. preventing resource-based conflicts	19
Green microfinance	17

1.24. Current private and public green investment initiative that support the local green economy

The current identified private and public green investment initiatives are listed in Youth empowerment initiatives, such as those of NGOs, include carpentry, poultry farming, and financial literacy programs. Furthermore, partnerships with financial institutions, such as the Empower Bank and the Women's Bank, provided opportunities for youth to access loans for sustainable projects, although uptake was limited due to strict loan assessment processes and youth hesitation to start small-scale ventures.

Despite these efforts, gaps persist in achieving widespread green adoption, particularly in rural areas, where climate change literacy is low. The lack of direct funding for green initiatives hampers large-scale adoption, as most programs rely on indirect resources and partnerships. There is also a pressing need for better market access and training to ensure sustainability in production, such as addressing postharvest losses in

vegetables through drying techniques. Moreover, while some organizations were driving digital and climate-smart agricultural advocacy, youth involvement remained inconsistent due to funding constraints and limited inclusivity in policy discussions. Expanding stakeholder collaboration, increasing direct funding, and enhancing awareness have been noted as crucial to fostering a more sustainable and inclusive green economy.

Table 5. Green clinics, particularly solar-powered facilities, were the most common (68.2%) identified green initiatives in the districts surveyed. This indicates a commitment by various stakeholders to enhance healthcare accessibility while promoting renewable energy use. Knowledge-sharing platforms came closely with 55.1% of youths recognizing the initiative. Urban agriculture initiatives, including community gardens and vertical farming, were recognized by 53.3% of youths, while rainwater harvesting was recognized by 50.5%. The other current initiatives are listed in Table 5

According to FGDs and KIIs, current green initiatives in the surveyed districts were initiated by local leadership/communities, government programs, and non-governmental organizations (NGO). These green interventions included nutrition gardens, solarization of community garden boreholes, and rainwater harvesting to counter the challenges posed by erratic rainfall and water scarcity. These gardens, often supported by NGOs, encouraged community participation, particularly among the youth, by allocating specific ownership of garden beds to them. Additionally, schools have adopted biodigesters and LPG for energy use, moving away from traditional coal and firewood. Individuals in the surveyed district were also investing at the household level in solutions such as borehole drilling and solar power utilization for lighting and irrigation. These have also become widespread, although concerns about their ecological impacts persist. Local authorities and civil society organizations have been proactive in engaging the youth in green initiatives and environmental awareness. Projects such as tree-planting programs and waste management efforts by local stakeholders have illustrated a growing commitment to eco-friendly practices. Urban agriculture, green parks, and recycling efforts have been initiated by NGOs and local councils, although challenges in scaling these projects remain. In identifying green initiatives in his area, one local leader said:

"In 2024- ZESA introduced prepaid system for tower lights without consulting council, they then cut power saying council has a debt. As a community we resolved to using solar tower lights to reduce carbon emissions. We also encourage solar use at household level. A local organization called Victory was planting trees and sharing information on climate change. Greener parks in the wards e.g. Nketa 6- and One-way spaces. I am trying to engage stakeholders to assist in revamping them because they are wetlands. On waste management- we have local people who are hired on a 3-month basis to be picking up waste." Key Informant – Local leader - Councilor

Youth empowerment initiatives, such as those of NGOs, include carpentry, poultry farming, and financial literacy programs. Furthermore, partnerships with financial institutions, such as the Empower Bank and the Women's Bank, provided opportunities for youth to access loans for sustainable projects, although uptake was limited due to strict loan assessment processes and youth hesitation to start small-scale ventures.

Despite these efforts, gaps persist in achieving widespread green adoption, particularly in rural areas, where climate change literacy is low. The lack of direct funding for green initiatives hampers large-scale adoption, as most programs rely on indirect resources and partnerships. There is also a pressing need for better market access and training to ensure sustainability in production, such as addressing postharvest losses in vegetables through drying techniques. Moreover, while some organizations were driving digital and climate-smart agricultural advocacy, youth involvement remained inconsistent due to funding constraints and limited inclusivity in policy discussions. Expanding stakeholder collaboration, increasing direct funding, and enhancing awareness have been noted as crucial to fostering a more sustainable and inclusive green economy.

Table 5: Currently available private and public green investment initiative

Current green initiatives	Youth response (%)		
	Yes	No	Not sure
Green clinics e.g. solar powered clinics	68.2	15.0	16.8
Knowledge sharing platforms	55.1	18.7	26.2
Urban agriculture e.g. community gardens and vertical farming	53.3	29.0	17.8
Rainwater harvesting	50.5	29.9	19.6
Green homes e.g. with solar or recycled bricks	44.9	27.1	28.0
Renewable energy e.g. solar, biogas	41.1	32.7	26.2
Eco-schools e.g. sustainable schools	34.6	32.7	32.7
Agro-ecology e.g. organic farming, permaculture	29.9	29.9	40.2
Energy efficiency promotion e.g. led lighting	29.0	36.5	34.6
Public-private partnerships	27.1	27.1	45.8
Food waste reduction	26.2	41.1	32.7
Watershed/catchment management e.g. reforestation and catchment protection	25.2	37.4	37.4
Eco-sanitation e.g. composite toilets and eco-friendly sewer	25.2	36.5	38.3

treatment systems			
Urban green spaces. e.g. parks and green areas for mental health	25.2	57.9	16.8
Community resource governance e.g. communities co-managing forests, water, and minerals sustainably.	24.3	35.5	40.2
Circular economy enterprises e.g. businesses focused on repair, reuse, and recycling	22.4	45.8	31.8
Green jobs e.g. in renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable agriculture	19.6	46.7	33.6
Land redistribution	19.6	41.1	39.3
Environmental justice campaigns e.g. address disparities in pollution exposure	19.6	36.5	43.9
Green skills development	18.7	44.9	36.5
Climate justice movements	17.8	40.2	42.1
Participatory governance e.g. marginalized communities in environmental decision-making.	15.9	45.8	38.3
Conflict-sensitive resource management e.g. preventing resource-based conflicts	15.0	42.1	43.0
Sustainability forums	15.0	35.5	49.5
Eco-tourism e.g. nature-based tourism projects	13.1	61.7	25.2
Green policy advocacy	13.1	43.0	43.9
Green microfinance	7.5	57.9	34.6

1.25. Digital advocacy

1.25.1. Digital advocacy participation

The bar chart in Figure 13 illustrates the level of participation in digital advocacy among the surveyed 107 youths. The majority (67.3%) had not yet participated in digital advocacy efforts. A smaller proportion (19.6%) reported active involvement in digital advocacy, while 13.1% were unsure about their participation. These findings highlight a gap in youth engagement with digital advocacy, suggesting potential barriers such as lack of awareness, interest, or access to digital platforms. Among those who participated, advocacy efforts focused on various critical issues. This included education, particularly the construction of vocational training centers, and improving access to information. They also demanded gender equality, women's empowerment,

and a fight against gender-based violence. Additionally, they called for action to address corruption, improve service delivery, and ensure inclusive participation in the electoral processes. They demanded better governance and accountability at both local and central government levels.

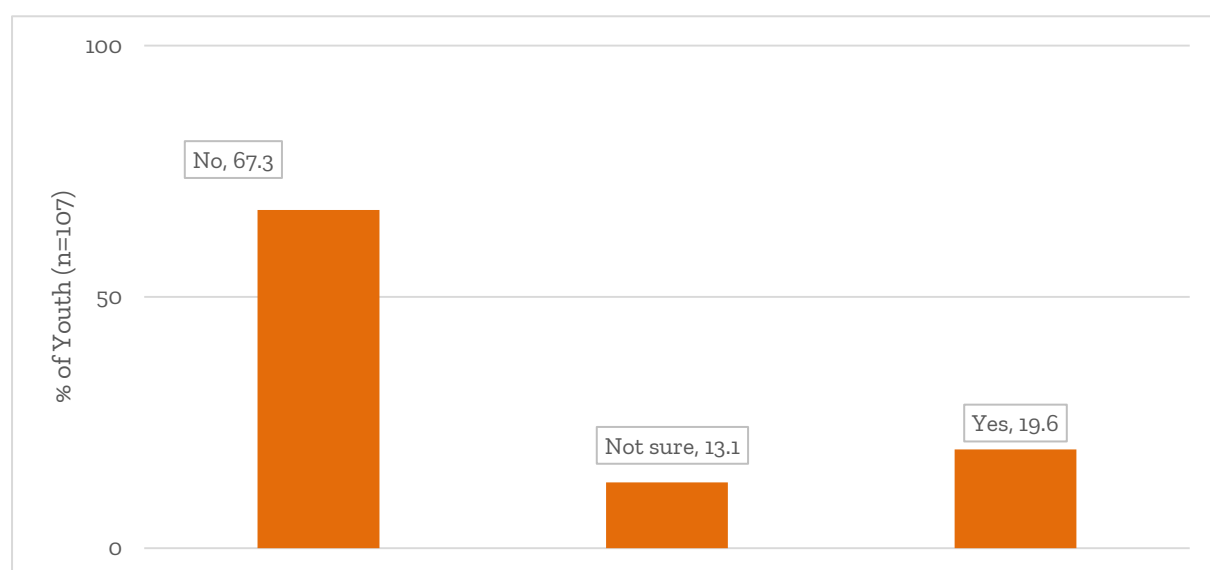


Figure 13: Digital advocacy participation

Other advocacy efforts targeted environmental issues such as water conservation and climate change mitigation, alongside health-related campaigns, including the provision of sanitary wear, increased funding for tuberculosis programs, and support for people living with HIV. Furthermore, participants advocated that Zimbabwe abolish the death penalty, end child marriages, and address juvenile delinquency, showcasing a broad commitment to social justice and community well-being. The initiatives they participated in were supported by NGOs

1.25.2. Digital advocacy challenges

The challenges faced in digital advocacy are varied and complex, reflecting both systemic and individual barriers. Challenges included lack of access to data and affordable Internet, with youths stating that data tariffs were expensive. Other obstacles included poor network connectivity, particularly in areas like Matobo District, where Ward 19 had one village facing network challenges, Ward 24 had five villages affected, Ward 22 had two villages with connectivity issues, and Ward 9 also experienced network problems. Similarly, in Gwanda, especially in Gwanda South, network challenges were widespread. Additionally, limited access to internet-enabled gadgets further exacerbated the issue, hindering connectivity and access to digital resources for youth. Other challenges included limited incomes, high costs of data and devices, and energy shortages, all of which contributed to digital divide in the project districts. This divide made it difficult for young people to engage effectively in digital advocacy for local issues affecting them. Additionally, low literacy levels and a lack of

digital skills limited their participation, particularly in communities with low social media literacy. Youth also highlighted that the digital gap and fragmented audiences reduced the reach and impact of advocacy efforts. Ignorance and a lack of knowledge about digital advocacy also prevented many youths from engaging meaningfully.

Fear and intimidation were another challenge youth faced in digital advocacy, where they were concerned about cyberbullying, political threats, and their inability to express views freely due to potential government intervention or police action. Issues of manipulation, hacking, and destructive criticism compounded their sense of insecurity online. Moreover, youth noted that targeted leaders often ignored issues highlighted on digital platforms, making digital advocacy efforts ineffective. Other challenges include poor transparency, low followership among youth, and the perception that digital advocacy rarely results in tangible action. Overall, these challenges highlight the need for improved infrastructure, digital literacy programs, and efforts to address systemic inequalities to enhance the effectiveness of digital advocacy. One youth said:

"Twitter, because there is a lot of aggressiveness because there are no admins, there is a lot of freedom of speech, from where I come from if you are seen on twitter they will call you a cheese boy. There is no privacy in some digital platforms, digital platforms expose who I am so I prefer interacting physically. Facebook content is for older people so not fascinating."
Youth FGD participant.

1.25.3. Digital advocacy opportunities

Digital advocacy presents numerous opportunities, particularly in its ability to amplify voices and connect individuals and organizations across a wider audience. One of its greatest advantages lies in its global reach, which allows advocates to access and engage with diverse populations beyond their immediate communities. This connectivity facilitates knowledge sharing, awareness creation, and rapid mobilization, ensuring that critical issues gain visibility and momentum in real-time. Digital platforms also offered an opportunity for marginalized groups to voice their concerns and participate in discussions that might otherwise exclude them. By engaging in multiple digital channels, youth can personalize their messaging, reach like-minded individuals, and build impactful partnerships with organizations and donors who share similar goals. These opportunities not only increase the effectiveness of advocacy efforts but also enhance inclusivity and collaboration.

Another notable benefit of digital advocacy is its potential to create economic and professional opportunities. Youth highlighted the ability of digital platforms to generate job opportunities, support business marketing, and provide avenues for

fundraising. With wider exposure, individuals build networks, connect with sponsors, and access green jobs and loans for youth development. Furthermore, digital advocacy enables advocates to engage with others across vast geographical areas, avoiding logistical challenges such as travel while reducing environmental impacts such as emissions. It is a cost-effective means to achieve outreach, allowing campaigns to spread information faster, engage with new audiences, and secure the support necessary to effect meaningful changes. By offering a platform to address issues efficiently and safely, digital advocacy has become a powerful tool for creating awareness, driving actions, and fostering community building.

1.25.4. Digital platforms used for advocacy

The digital platforms used by the youth for advocacy are shown in Figure 14. WhatsApp was the most popular platform used by 81.0% of the youth. Facebook accounted for 41.0%, highlighting its continued relevance to digital engagement. Platforms such as Instagram (19.0%) and X (formerly Twitter) (23.0%) showed moderate usage, whereas websites were similarly used by 23.0% of the youth. SMS, despite being a more traditional medium, was still utilized by 9.0% of the youth. A smaller proportion (5.0%) relied on other platforms. These findings suggest that WhatsApp is the dominant tool for advocacy, likely because of its accessibility and ease of use, while platforms such as Facebook and websites provide complementary spaces for broader audience engagement. However, seasoned activists in Zimbabwe use X (Twitter), where most national governance and accountability issues are discussed before attracting government response through national broadcasters and print media. Political decision-makers in Zimbabwe closely follow the X (Twitter) discussion. Nevertheless, the varied use of platforms by youth has highlighted the importance of adopting a multi-channel strategy to effectively reach diverse audiences.

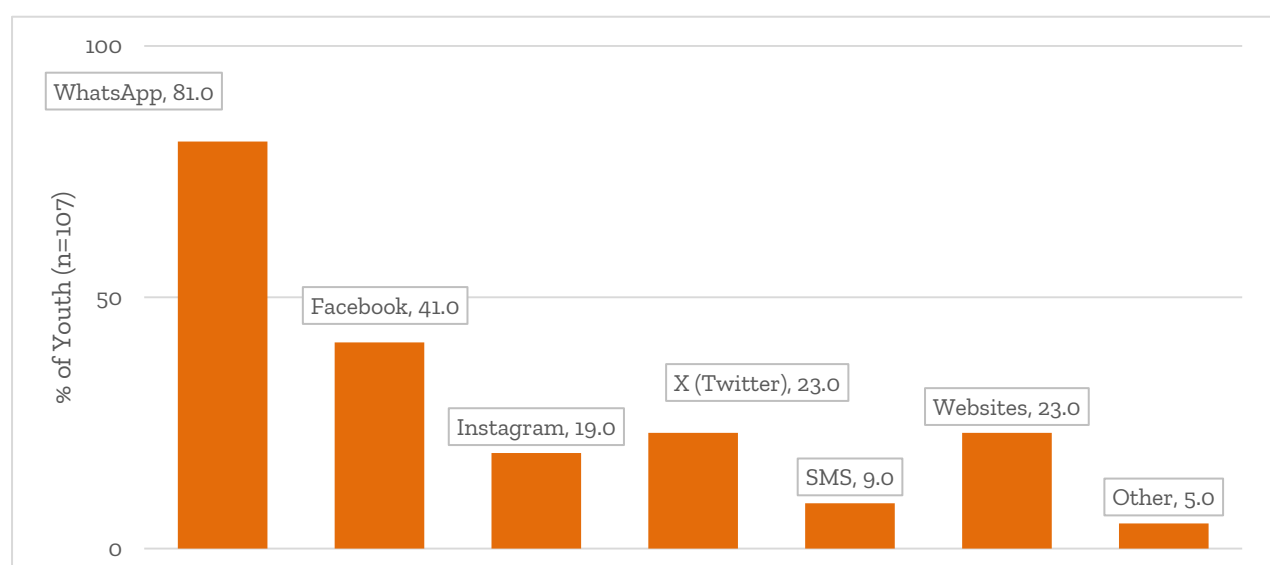


Figure 14: Digital platforms used for advocacy

Other noted channels for advocacy included applications designed for advocacy, such as One Impact, news/broadcasting channels, TikTok, and Zoom for educational purposes or information sharing and discussions.

1.25.5. Effective strategies for mobilizing online support into real-world action

It was noted that mobilizing online support into real-world action required a combination of strategic communication, inclusive engagement, and clear call-to-action. Youth highlighted the importance of integrating online platforms with offline activities, such as organizing physical meetings once or twice a month, to foster maximum cooperation and stronger connections. Platforms such as WhatsApp have been repeatedly mentioned for their accessibility and effectiveness in creating discussion groups and quickly spreading information. By tailoring messages to resonate with youth-lived experiences and using local languages, advocacy champions ensure broader understanding and participation. Similarly, incorporating visuals, such as videos, pictures, and hashtags, amplifies campaigns and increases audience engagement. Clear and relatable messaging is crucial, particularly when targeting youth and marginalized groups.

The provision of incentives has also emerged as an effective strategy to motivate individuals to act. This included providing financial support, offering rewards, and using gamification techniques to actively engage participants. Partnering with influencers or like-minded organizations further amplified advocacy efforts, while creative approaches such as live podcasts, storytelling, and using trending clips captured attention and drove action. Social media campaigns, especially on widely used platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, should be complemented with petitions and awareness campaigns to ensure rapid mobilization. Finally, data-driven decision making and mobile optimization have been emphasized as critical tools for tracking engagement and refining strategies. By blending online outreach with real-world events and fostering a sense of community, advocacy champions have bridged the gap between digital support and tangible outcomes. One youth said:

"To mobilize online support into real-world action, use clear calls-to-action and personalized messaging. Leverage social media campaigns and influencer partnerships to amplify your message. Organize online-to-offline events and gamify experiences to encourage action. Use data-driven decision making and mobile optimization to track engagement and inform strategies. By implementing these tactics, you can drive meaningful change and achieve your goals." Youth survey participant.

One KII said

"Young people are divorced from the society. You can't approach them but you need to attract them e.g. the issuance of grants where you use young people to do activities in the communities and they get paid for it. You can't have youths participating without incentives e.g. when having projects, you can identify skilled youths to do the work at least 20% of them e.g. stands fabrication, welding, brick laying. So for the youths you can use monetary incentives, tournaments, and shows with the most liked artists to attract them. Formal spaces are less preferred as opposed to social spaces. Use socialites if you want to deliver a message e.g. models, artistes from different genres. Royalties- when you interact more on these digital platforms you get royalties hence make more money e.g. YouTube, Spotify. Incentives for registration to vote those who would have registered the highest number of youths gets the highest incentive. You can use social media soldiers (advocates) than going to the streets. Use incentive-based approach or competitions to lure them. Use of small TikTok videos in the language of the youths to send out a message that wants their attention. Use young people to address the problems e.g. young councilors because they will be easy to understand and approach Incentivizing e.g. best proposal for climate change solutions, NUST vs. UZ. Things should be attractive, innovative and on point." Key informant - Councilor

1.25.6. Local CSOs and CBOs and digital technologies to mobilize support and advocate for local issues

Local civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) have increasingly leveraged digital technologies to mobilize support and advocate for local issues. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn are commonly used because of their accessibility and accessibility. WhatsApp, in particular, was the preferred platform for creating community groups where youth shared their concerns and discussed pressing local issues. Additionally, online campaigns, digital storytelling, and the use of info graphics in local languages have proved to be common and effective in amplifying local voices. Some organizations have also started using digital platforms to raise awareness, host online events, and organize capacity-building exercises to educate and mobilize communities. Furthermore, efforts have been made to utilize data-driven advocacy by gathering information and presenting it to policymakers and stakeholders to push for the necessary changes.

However, the adoption of digital technologies by local CSOs and CBOs is challenging. Issues, such as high data costs, network connectivity problems, and limited access to digital devices, have hindered the widespread use of these tools. Stakeholders or duty bearers also face the same challenges, especially those based in rural towns and areas. While digital platforms were being utilized to a certain extent, the potential for broader engagement remained untapped due to these barriers. Currently, CSOs and CBOs rely heavily on traditional methods of advocacy, such as in-person meetings and

workshops, as digital infrastructure is still being developed in their target project areas. Despite these challenges, the gradual integration of digital technologies, coupled with innovative strategies such as providing free Wi-Fi in community spaces, showed promise for future advocacy efforts to mobilize communities and drive change.

1.25.7. Convincing young people to participate in digital platforms

To encourage young people to participate on digital platforms, they must address their specific needs, interests, and challenges. The provision of incentives, such as free data, affordable Internet access, and even monetary rewards, was stated to be a strong motivator. Youths emphasized the importance of educating youth about the benefits of digital platforms through interactive workshops, training, and storytelling that resonate with their interests and daily realities. Creating safe spaces, offering relatable content, and ensuring inclusivity are also crucial strategies. Furthermore, connecting digital advocacy to issues that directly impacted young people, such as job creation, financial gain, or addressing community challenges, fostered engagement. Access to resources, such as smartphones and Wi-Fi, combined with peer-to-peer engagement and support from relatable influencers, was seen as an effective way to inspire participation while building capacity and ensuring sustained involvement.

1.25.8. Youth interaction with Local authority through digital platform

The bar graph in Figure 15 presents data on youth interactions with local authorities through digital platforms. The majority of the surveyed youths (66.4%) indicated that they did not interact with local authorities using digital platforms. Those who did, comprised a small proportion (18.7%). Interestingly, 15% of the respondents expressed uncertainty about their interactions with local authorities through digital channels. These findings suggest that, while digital platforms offer potential avenues for youth engagement with local governance, their utilization remains relatively low.

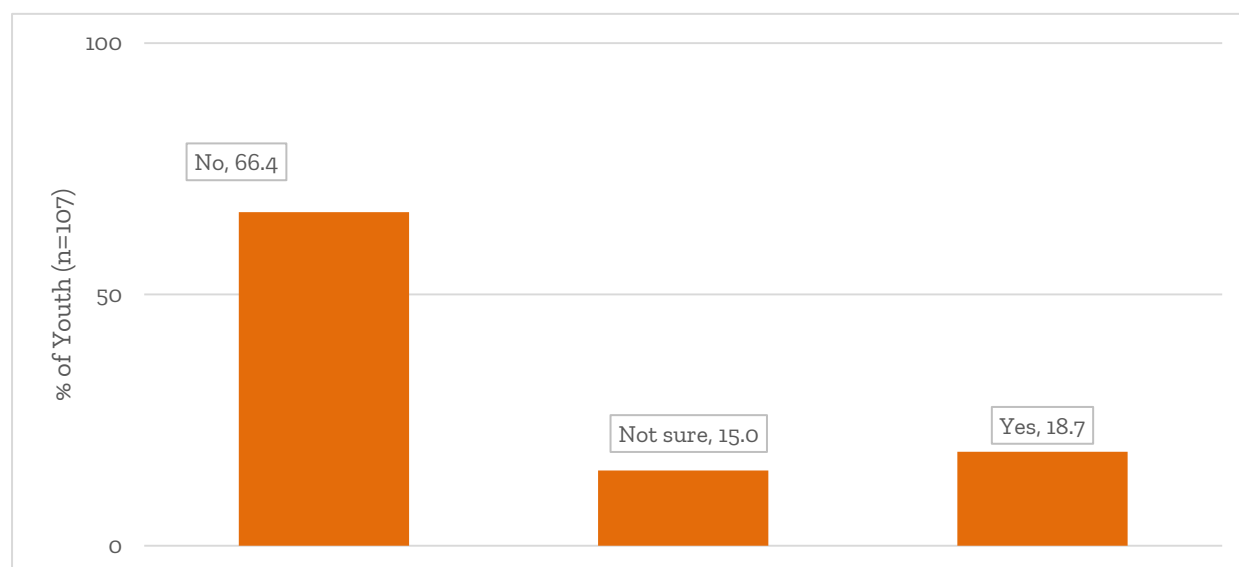


Figure 15: Youth interaction with Local authority through digital platform

For youth that interacted with their local authorities, a diverse range of local issues motivated them. They sought active participation in local governance issues, advocating for inclusion of youth interests in decision-making processes. For example, one young person drafted a Memorandum of Understanding, and was able to consult two councilors and the Council for guidance. However, some youth interactions with their local authorities were reactive and driven by dissatisfaction with service delivery, such as reporting burst sewers, water shortages, and other infrastructural problems. Furthermore, youth engaged local authorities for transparency and knowledge, seeking to learn about local governance processes so that they could contribute their ideas for improvement. Convenience and efficiency were also motivators, with some youths using digital platforms to avoid the time and effort required to visit government offices.

1.25.9. Digital advocacy training

Most youths (73.8%) were not trained on digital advocacy, as shown in Figure 16. This indicates a widespread lack of access or awareness regarding these opportunities both online and offline. The proportion of trained youths (15.9%) was very low for effective advocacy. In the surveyed districts, there was a need to create digital education training that focused on online advocacy. By addressing this barrier, local authorities, CSOs, and CBOs can enhance youth participation in digital advocacy efforts, ultimately empowering them to contribute effectively to community issues and decision-making processes.

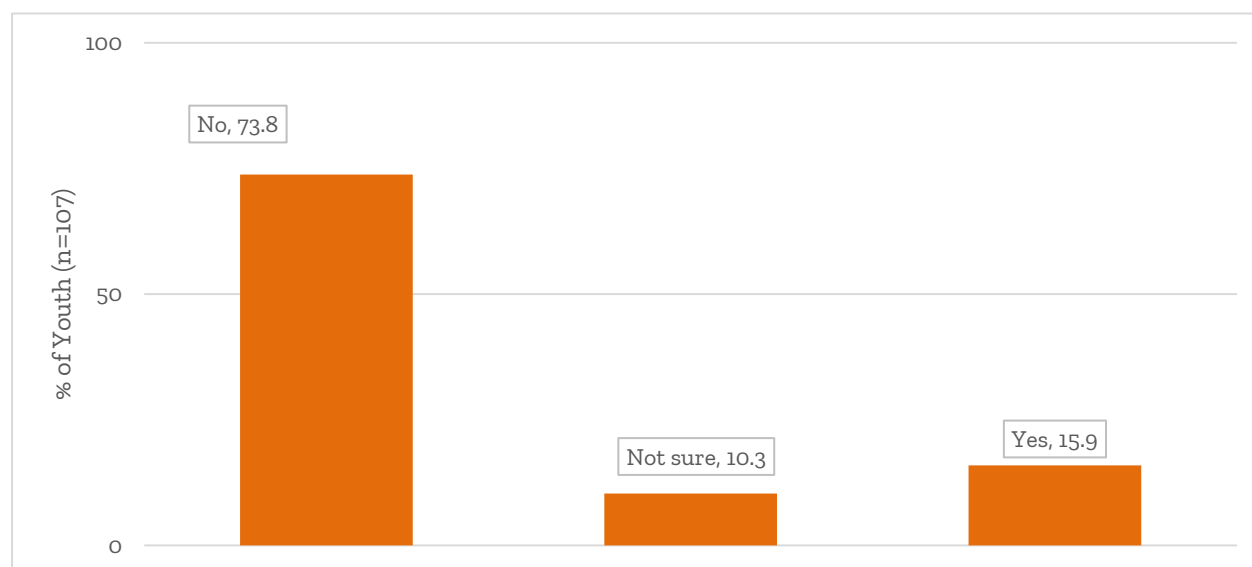


Figure 16: Digital advocacy training

1.25.10. Youth interaction with political or traditional leader through digital platforms

The bar graph in Figure 17 illustrates the level of youth interaction with political and traditional leaders through digital platforms. The majority (70.1%) of the surveyed youths did not interact with these leaders using digital channels. The proportion of those who did so was small at 20.6%, suggesting that while digital platforms offered potential avenues for youth engagement with political and traditional leadership, their utilization remained relatively low.

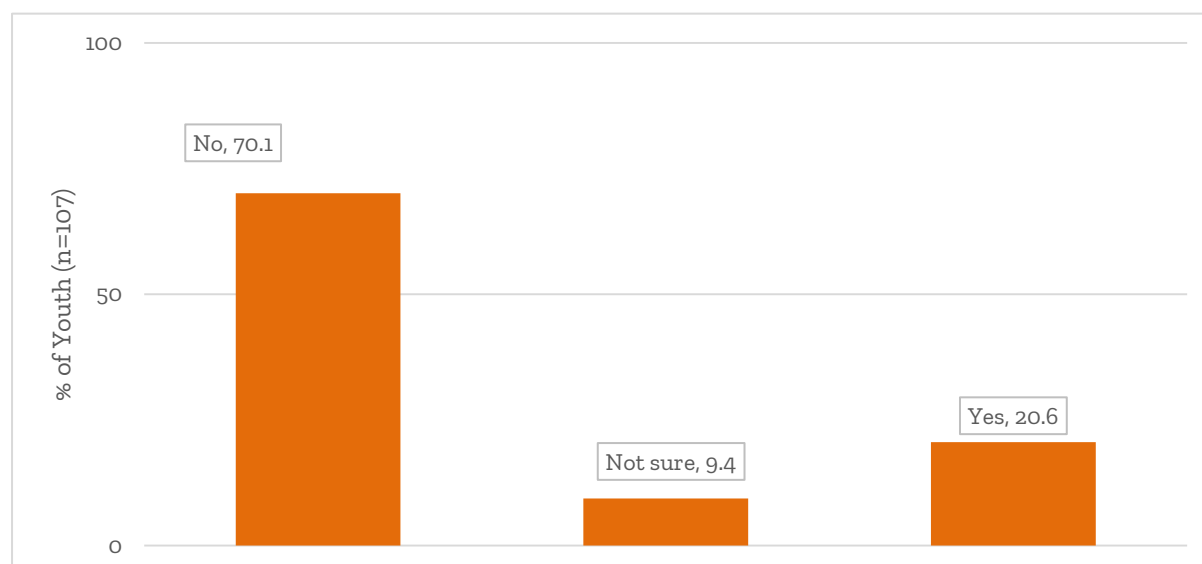


Figure 17: Youth interaction with political or traditional leader through digital platforms

While the majority of the youth did not interact with local leaders digitally, those who did so were for proactive and reactive reasons. Proactive engagement includes utilizing platforms for advocacy and influence, such as sharing views, making suggestions, and presenting petitions. Youths also leveraged digital platforms for personal and professional development, seeking mentorship, job opportunities, and connections. Furthermore, digital platforms facilitate communication and information dissemination, enabling youths to access information on local developments, inquire about project progress, and communicate their needs and concerns to leaders. For example, in the 2013 run up to elections, most politicians used social media to mobilize voters, and youth used those platforms to engage in the post-election period.

1.25.11. Digital rights

According to the survey data, 52.3% of the youth did not know their digital rights, while 26.2% were aware of them, as shown in Figure 18. Additionally, 21.5% of the youth were unsure about their digital rights, reflecting a gap in awareness or understanding of digital rights among the youth in the survey population. This highlights the need for increased education and engagement to ensure that youth are well informed about their rights and protection in the digital world.

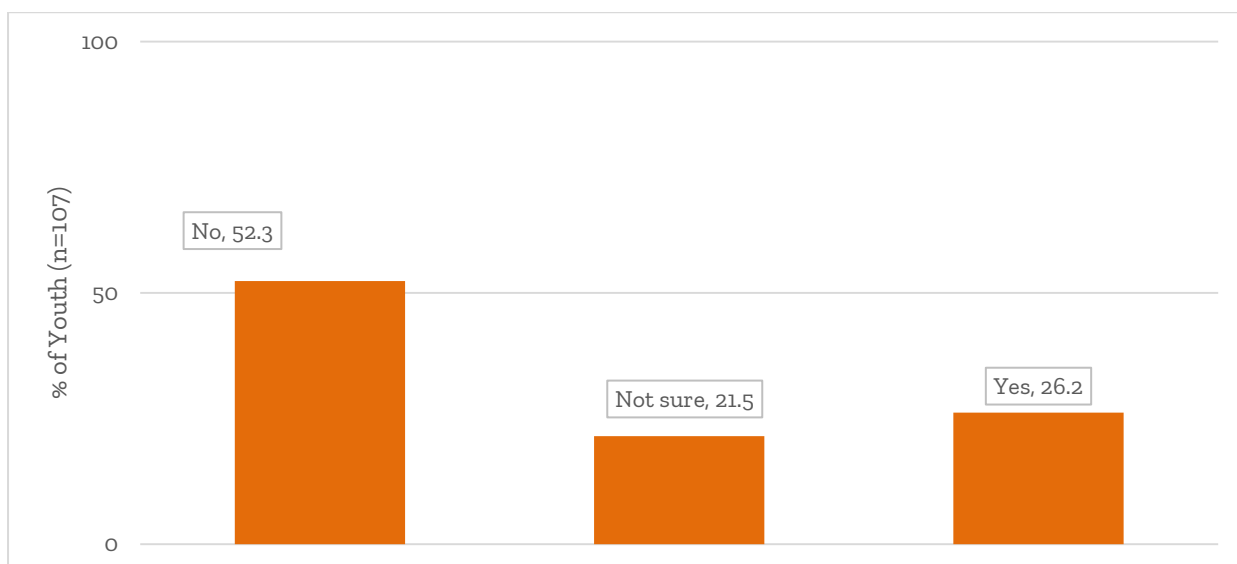


Figure 18: Digital rights

1.25.12. Digital green economic initiatives platforms

The bar graph in Figure 19 illustrates youth awareness of the green economic initiatives promoted through digital platforms. The majority of the surveyed youth (60.8%) were unaware of such platforms. Those who did (13.1%) meant social media platforms of organizations that promoted such initiatives as Environmental Management Agency social media pages and NGOs with such projects. Notably, 26.2% of the youths were unsure of whether they were aware of such platforms.

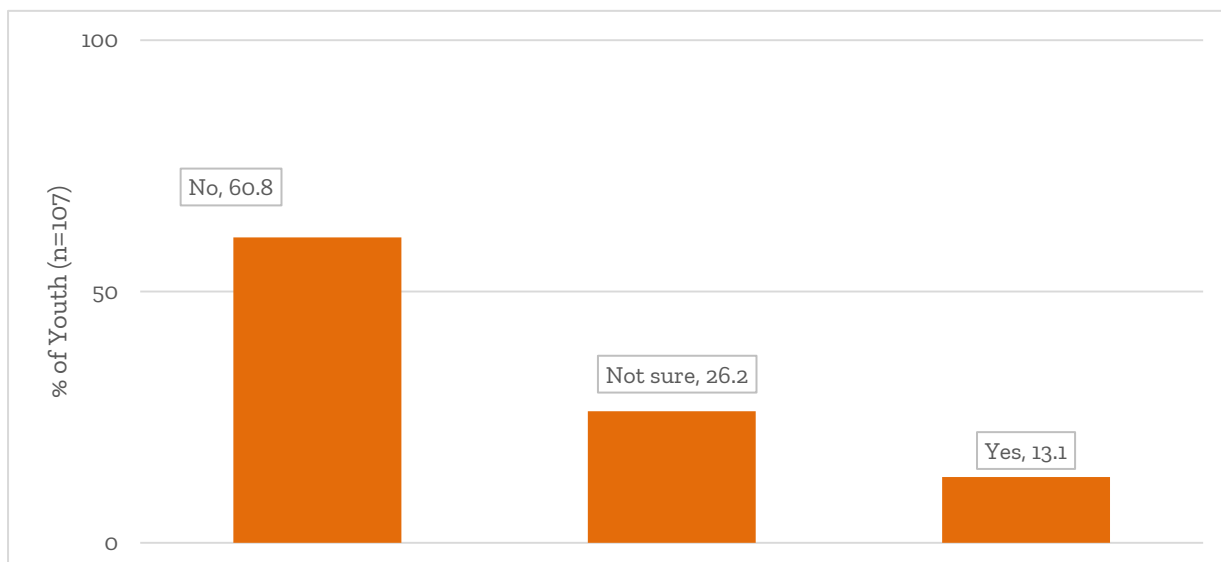


Figure 19: Digital green economic initiatives platforms

1.25.13. Digital legislative framework in Zimbabwe

The digital legislative framework in Zimbabwe was a complex landscape for youth understanding, with various laws and acts related to human rights, cyber security, and data protection. Youths and stakeholders lacked knowledge about specific legislation, highlighting a gap in awareness regarding pertinent laws, such as the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Cyber security and Data Protection Act of 2021, and the Interception of Communications Act. While some youths and stakeholders were aware of the Freedom of Information Act and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, they knew the details of the law. Figure 20 illustrates young women, young men, people with disabilities, Youth-led CSOs and CBOs and government officials' awareness and understanding of the digital legislative framework, as observed by the surveyed youth. A substantial 60.8% of the youth reported a low level of awareness, indicating a gap in knowledge about pertinent laws and regulations governing digital spaces among stakeholders. Meanwhile, only 36.5% of the youth responded that young women, young men, people with disabilities, Youth-led CSOs and government officials' understanding of the digital legislative framework was average, and only 2.8% felt they possessed a high level of awareness. This distribution highlights a critical need for educational initiatives aimed at informing young women, young men, people with disabilities, Youth-led CSOs and CBOs and government officials about the digital legislative context in which they operate. The overwhelming prevalence of low awareness suggests that, without targeted outreach and training, youth may struggle to effectively engage with or advocate for their rights within the digital landscape.

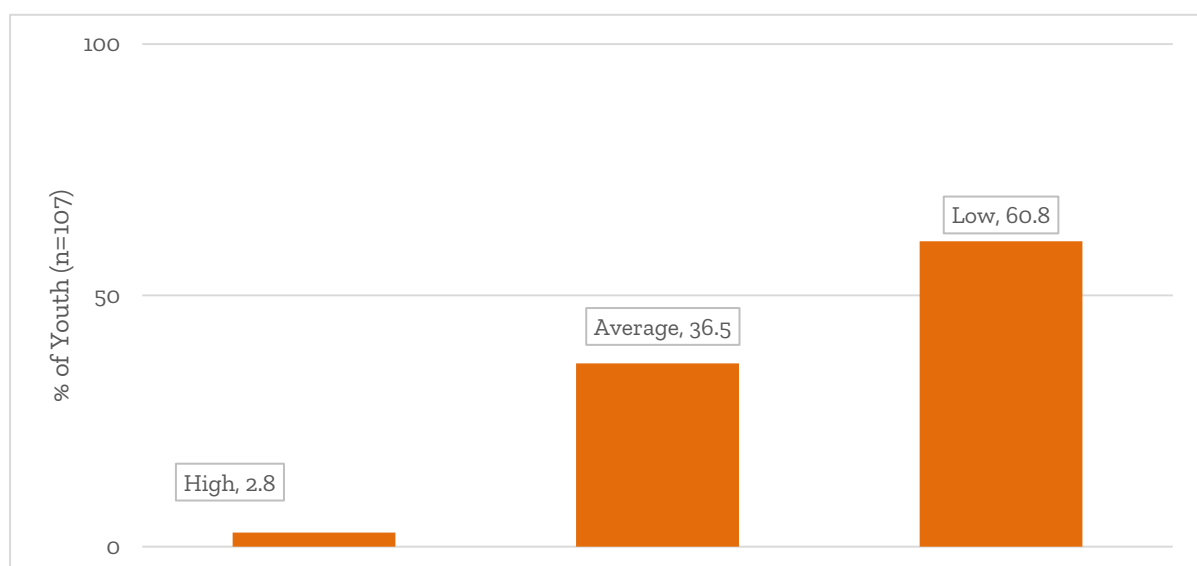


Figure 20: Level of awareness and understanding of digital legislative framework

Youth highlighted that Zimbabwe's digital legislative framework had gaps; that is, there was no independent data protection and cyber monitoring authorities, limited enforcement mechanisms, and overly broad surveillance powers that infringed on privacy and freedom of expression. Additionally, the lack of awareness and accessibility

to digital laws, particularly among marginalized communities and youth, exacerbated the issue, with many stakeholders expressing complete ignorance about their digital rights. Challenges, such as the high cost of technology, poor network connectivity, and insufficient digital literacy, further hinder the ability to engage with and understand these laws. Youth emphasized the need for capacity-building initiatives, awareness campaigns, and comprehensive legislation that ensured transparency, accountability, and protection against online harms, such as cyberbullying and data breaches. Addressing these gaps is essential to safeguard digital rights, promote equality, and foster a safe and inclusive digital environment in Zimbabwe. One youth said:

"There is a need for the laws to be availed to the marginalized communities so that they are aware of their existence and know what they entail." Youth survey participant.

Discussion

The study on digital platform usage for youth advocacy, with a focus on young women and their diverse needs, reveals several important findings that highlight both the potential and challenges of leveraging digital tools for advocating green economic opportunities and sustainable policies in Zimbabwe. The study found that digital adoption among Zimbabwean youth is uneven, with significant disparities between urban and rural areas. While access to mobile phones and the internet is widespread in urban areas, rural youth, particularly young women, face barriers to full participation in digital advocacy. According to studies by Kamat et al. (2020), digital access in rural Zimbabwe is hindered by factors like poor infrastructure, limited electricity, and expensive internet costs. These gaps significantly affect young women who often have fewer resources and are culturally expected to take on domestic roles, limiting their time and access to digital platforms. This suggests a need for targeted interventions that ensure equal access to technology for young women across diverse geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds (Fitzgerald & Nyarota, 2022). The study also found that youth, including young women, are primarily using mobile-based platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram to engage in environmental advocacy. WhatsApp, for instance, serves as a popular platform for organizing local events and sharing information in community-based settings (Grewal & Ncube, 2021). However, more visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok are gaining traction among urban youth, who use them to share environmental campaigns through images and videos. According to a report by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2021), social media provides a powerful tool for amplifying the voices of young activists. Yet, these platforms come with their own set of challenges, such as the digital divide in rural areas and the digital literacy gap, especially among older generations of young women. Hence, advocacy campaigns must tailor their strategies to the platform preferences of different youth demographics while addressing digital literacy.

Youth-led Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) are crucial players in digital advocacy for green economic opportunities. The study revealed that these organizations benefit from the global reach provided by digital tools, allowing them to mobilize youth and engage with international networks. However, challenges persist, such as limited financial resources to invest in digital infrastructure and capacity-building. Additionally, youth-led organizations often lack technical expertise in effectively using digital tools for policy advocacy (Sibanda et al., 2022). As observed by Chikodzi (2020), youth-led organizations in Zimbabwe also face challenges from a restrictive legal environment, including digital surveillance and occasional internet shutdowns that hinder the free expression needed for advocacy. Finally, the study identified national and sub-national advocacy platforms as essential vehicles for advancing youth participation in green economic opportunities. While Zimbabwe has youth-focused platforms such as the Zimbabwe Youth Council (ZYC),

they are often underutilized due to insufficient engagement strategies and a lack of awareness among young people. At the local level, community-based organizations (CBOs) are more effective in fostering direct youth involvement in environmental advocacy. This reflects findings by Chikodzi (2020), which suggest that youth participation is most successful when it is locally-driven and tailored to the specific environmental challenges of the community. The findings also highlight significant gaps in the awareness and understanding of the digital legislative framework, particularly among marginalized communities. With over half of the surveyed youths reporting low levels of awareness among stakeholders regarding digital rights and laws, it was evident that education and outreach were crucial for empowering young individuals to navigate the digital landscape effectively. The lack of independent data protection authorities and insufficient enforcement mechanisms further exacerbates this issue, posing risks to privacy and freedom of expression. Addressing these gaps through capacity-building initiatives, awareness campaigns, and comprehensive legislative reforms is essential for creating a safe and inclusive digital environment. The youth's calls for increased transparency and accessibility to information reflect a growing demand for advocacy that not only protects their rights but also fosters a culture of accountability and empowerment in the digital realm.

In terms of advocating for a green economy, youth were particularly interested in initiatives such as urban agriculture, rainwater harvesting, and renewable energy solutions. However, the findings also highlight several challenges hindering the realization of a robust green economy in Zimbabwe. Key obstacles include limited access to financing, the high costs associated with green technologies, and inadequate infrastructure to support sustainable practices. Stakeholders expressed concerns over the limited direct funding for green initiatives from the government and bureaucratic hurdles associated with accessing loans, which stifled entrepreneurship and innovation in the sector. Additionally, systemic barriers such as low climate change literacy, particularly in rural areas, and the absence of targeted policies to support youth involvement in green initiatives further complicate efforts. Despite these challenges, the findings highlight opportunities for collaboration between local governments, civil society organizations, and youth to foster a green economy. By leveraging digital platforms for advocacy, providing training on sustainable practices, and enhancing access to resources, stakeholders can empower youth to play a pivotal role in advancing environmental sustainability while addressing their immediate socioeconomic needs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlights both the potential and the barriers for youth, especially young women, in leveraging digital platforms for advocating green economic opportunities and sustainable policies in Zimbabwe. While the digital landscape offers opportunities for organizing and mobilizing, significant barriers such as unequal access to technology, digital literacy gaps, and restrictive legislative frameworks must be addressed to ensure equitable participation. Strengthening digital infrastructure, promoting gender-inclusive digital literacy programs, and advocating for stronger digital rights protections are critical steps to enhancing the effectiveness of digital advocacy in Zimbabwe. The baseline findings provide a multifaceted view of the challenges and opportunities facing youth in Zimbabwe, particularly in terms of digital engagement and the green economy. The gaps in awareness regarding digital rights and legislative frameworks highlight the urgent need for educational initiatives aimed at empowering young individuals and stakeholders in their locations. This lack of knowledge, coupled with barriers such as inadequate access to digital technologies and socio-economic instability, highlights the necessity for targeted interventions that address both the rights of youth and their socio-economic conditions.

In terms of the green economy, the demonstrated interest of youth in sustainable initiatives such as urban agriculture and renewable energy signified their readiness to engage in environmental stewardship. However, systemic challenges, including limited access to funding, inadequate infrastructure, and low climate literacy must be addressed to fully harness this potential. By fostering collaboration between youth, local authorities, and civil society organizations, stakeholders can create a supportive environment that promotes sustainable practices while simultaneously addressing the socioeconomic needs of young people. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of an integrated approach that combines digital infrastructure, digital literacy, advocacy for rights, and green economic initiatives to empower the youth and foster a more sustainable and equitable future in Zimbabwe.

Recommendations

Based on the baseline findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance youth engagement in green digital advocacy and promote a sustainable green economy in Zimbabwe that is inclusive. There is need to;

1. **Educational initiatives and digital green advocacy strategy:** Develop educational programmes focused on digital rights, legislative frameworks, and environmental sustainability. Workshops and training sessions should be tailored to the youth, especially young women and stakeholders, particularly in marginalized communities, to improve awareness and understanding of their rights and available resources. When communities have been trained on green initiatives, there is a need for a green advocacy strategy that will make trained stakeholders interested in promoting green initiatives.
2. **Access to digital technology:** Implement initiatives to improve access to affordable digital technologies and internet connectivity for both youths, especially young women and other stakeholders. This could include partnerships with local businesses to provide subsidized devices to public sector officials or leaders providing services to rural communities and youth, community Wi-Fi hotspots, or advocating for government programmes aimed at reducing data costs. When access to digital technology has been improved there is a need for a youth -local authority and a youth -local leadership digital engagement strategy. Youth want to participate in decision making, fair incomes, fair access to resources and economic opportunities in urban agriculture, rainwater harvesting, knowledge sharing platforms, renewable energy, green homes, green clinics, green job, sustainable agriculture, food waste reduction, eco-schools, agro-ecology, green skills development and urban green spaces.
3. **Capacity building:** Strengthen the capacity-of youth-led organizations and community-based organizations (CBOs) for them to effectively advocate digital rights and environmental issues, targeting young women. This includes training CSOs on digital advocacy strategies, digital literacy, sustainable practices and providing technical and financial support to youth-led organizations to help them better leverage digital tools for large-scale advocacy and policy influence.
4. **Funding and financial support:** Establish funding mechanisms specifically aimed at supporting youth-led green initiatives, targeting young women. This could involve creating grant programmes or microfinance opportunities that enable young entrepreneurs to start environmentally sustainable businesses.

5. **Community engagement:** Foster stronger collaboration between youth, local authorities, and civil society organizations to promote active participation in decision-making processes. This can be achieved through regular offline community youth dialogues, digital dialogues, and inclusive policy-making initiatives.
6. **Promote green initiatives:** Support and promotion of youth-led projects focused on urban agriculture, water harvesting in rural areas, renewable energy, and other sustainable practices. This could include recognition programmes, competitions, or partnerships with NGOs to facilitate the implementation of green projects.
7. **Advocacy campaigns:** Launch targeted advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about digital rights and the importance of a green economy. Utilizing popular social media platforms can enhance outreach and engage a wider audience in discussions about sustainability and rights. Additionally advocate for digital legislation that protects privacy, ensures data security, and promotes freedom of expression. Also advocate for rescheduling of council meetings to times that allow for women's participation, considering their domestic responsibilities, women leadership, women employment in offices that deal with women, programmes that address specific needs of young single mothers and other vulnerable youth groups, simplified loan application processes for youth and improved access to basic human essentials for youth.
8. **Monitoring and evaluation:** Establish a framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact of programs aimed at enhancing youth engagement in digital advocacy and green initiatives. Regular assessments can help identify challenges, measure progress, and adapt strategies accordingly.

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