



WOMEN OF UGANDA NETWORK



A Statement by Women of Uganda to Scrap Over the Top (OTT) and Mobile Money Taxes

We the Women of Uganda call for the immediate removal of the social media tax and the mobile money tax as it will widen the digital divide.

Over 4 billion people (60%) of the world population are still not connected on the Internet with nine out of 10 residing in developing Countries. A UNESCO report, indicates that three major challenges women face are poverty, violence and lack of access to information. Access to information by women is discouraged by high cost of the internet and limited digital skills.

Only about 37 percent of women surveyed in ten selected cities in the world, Kampala inclusive are found to be using the internet compared to 59 percent of males yet the newly adopted UN SDGS include an important pledge to harness information and ICTS to advance and empower women. This is against the commitment to connect everyone in low developing Countries to the Internet by 2020 (WWW 2015).

Similarly, the government of Uganda has committed to promote use of ICTS in order to help Uganda evolve into a knowledge-based economy. Despite the efforts, only 21 percent of women and girls in Uganda have access to the Internet yet it is projected that by 2035, Uganda's population will have grown to 68.4 million with 30 percent based in urban areas. In Uganda, 85 percent of the population live in rural areas yet 80 percent of the internet users are living in urban areas making it very difficult to empower them if access to information is restricted.

Hoverer, on 1st of July 2018, the government of Uganda implemented the OTT where each end user of the social media is required to pay mandatory 2% tax in order to access the social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Skype according to the excise duty amendment bill 2018(URA 2018).

Over the Top Services to be paid for include transmission or receipt of voice or message over the internet protocol network including access to virtual private networks including mobile money

which is very dangerous. This tax costs about 10 percent on average of the percapita income of Ugandans which is shockingly double what people spend on health care comparatively at a regional level and this has come at a time when the rural and urban poor dwellers have started using the internet to change their situation to gain a voice, seek information redress of daily social issues, enhance their livelihoods or expand their networks beyond existing social boundaries for better opportunities (OECD).

This tax imposes a very big threat to internet access since social media has been the initial entry point for many users of the internet. The soaring cost will directly discourage internet usage, undermine freedom of expression, association and assembly online by already low-income Ugandans with women, girls and students being most affected due to mobility barrier that has created gender digital gaps.

Therefore, we condemn and call upon the government to scrap this tax in order to stick to the national commitment of ensuring a universal access to the internet by 2020.