

FACT SHEET | JUNE 2019

UNPACKING SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN STABILIZATION EFFORTS

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High-level social media (SM) scandals in the news — like the electoral campaign manipulation conducted by Russian trolls and bots in the 2016 U.S. presidential election — have provoked Western countries to investigate how global corporations like the “American tech giants” Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and WhatsApp can be governed and held accountable for such mishaps. U.S. policymakers, intelligence agencies, the military, law enforcement, engineers, scientists, researchers, journalists, and educators are all grappling with what to do about the “Information World War” that continues to evolve within the SM ecosystem. While this conundrum is an important facet of SM governance, what policymakers and Western businesses often overlook is how fragile jurisdictions are currently proactively using SM strategically to help exit out of state fragility.

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

As the region with the highest concentration of fragile countries in the world, SSA actively creates and employs locally based SM or adaptations of the big-tech versions as a way of overcoming some of the barriers attributed to state fragility. Following are some examples that have prominence in several categories. However, these examples are not exclusive to one category, and many easily fit in multiple categories, sometimes simultaneously.



FINANCIAL INCLUSION

- **M-Pesa** is a Kenyan-created mobile platform that facilitates financial transactions. This platform contributes to financial inclusivity and has stimulated other versions across SSA, including Zaad in the Somali peninsula.
- **Ensbuuko** is a mobile microfinance management platform that is used in Uganda to help savings and loan cooperatives digitize their records. This helps enhance accountability and transparency.
- **WorldRemit** recently supplemented their global mobile-money-transferring platform with a new service that allows business-to-business payments, serving 149 countries across Africa and working via other popular platforms like M-Pesa. Incidentally, the founder of WorldRemit is a member of the Somali diaspora and operates out of the UK.



HEALTH & SECURITY

- **ButterflyiQ** is a handheld mobile ultrasound scanner for medical practitioners to use in remote areas in western Uganda that have predominately lower-income communities. This improves medical attention and support to the marginalized.
- **Momconnect** provides mothers or soon-to-be mothers with critical maternal, newborn, and childcare information via text messages in South Africa. The service was created to be compatible with and accessible through WhatsApp.
- **Usalama** is a platform that allows people to send emergency messages with geographical coordinates to emergency service providers and approved contacts such as friends and family. The platform has gained support from a series of health, security, and women-focused entities.



SUPPLY CHAIN

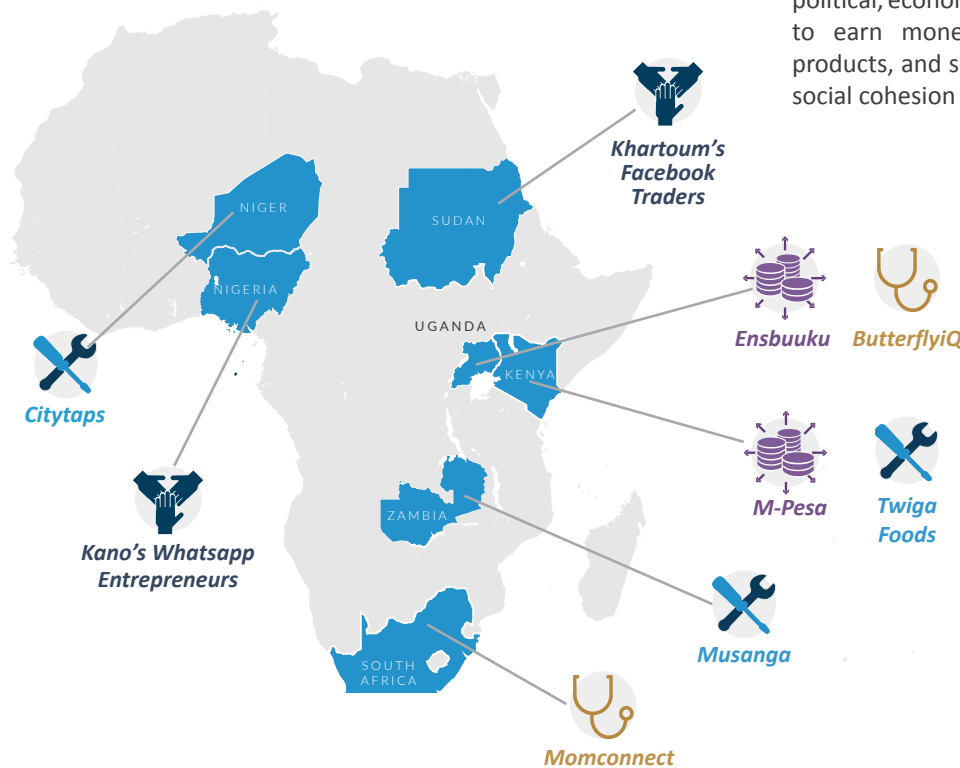
- **Citytaps** is a mobile micro-prepayment platform that manages water consumption. This improves accessibility for urban low-income communities in Niger to monitor their water usage and the performance of their water meters.
- **Musanga** is a mobile platform that connects independent cyclists, motorbike riders, and truck drivers to individuals and businesses in need of on-demand delivery and logistical support in Zambia. This provides employment opportunities for youth.
- **Twiga Foods** is a Kenyan business-to-business food supply platform that is mobile-based and connects informal retail vendors in cities with smallholder farmers in rural parts of Kenya, helping create a formal farmer's market association.



SOCIAL COHESION

- **Ushahidi** is a Kenyan-created platform that enables people to crowdsource information about electoral processes, public engagement, and the coordination of relief efforts. This helps promote accountability and transparency.
- **Khartoum's Facebook Traders (tajirat al-Facebook)**: in Sudan, a country shaped by Sharia law and currently undergoing a lot of turmoil, use of WhatsApp and Facebook has allowed women traders to interact exclusively with other women and engage in political debates without jeopardizing social expectations aligned to class, gender, and religion.
- **Kano's WhatsApp entrepreneurs**: in a primarily Muslim community, women in Kano, Nigeria, use WhatsApp to communicate and exchange information with local politicians and other women. Female participants have been able to exercise higher levels of agency within political, economic, and societal spheres. The opportunity to earn money from advertising small businesses, products, and services - reduces inequities and improves social cohesion among this community.

Social Media Use by Country



Social Media with Broader Geographic Reach:



CONCLUSION

Social media use has provided access to entertainment, opportunities for a richer social life, and the ability to communicate with many others in a manner that was not possible just a few decades ago. In SSA, the convergence of homegrown ideas and collaboration with the international community has enabled SSA to use SM as an avenue to fill existing and emerging gaps across sectors. What makes the region stand out even more is that the needs of its people are placed at the forefront of these processes. As a result, SSA is innovating SM in ways that significantly improve the lives of those impacted by state fragility.

For more information & examples, contact info@oneearthfuture.org