



Greetings from Kampala, Uganda.

As is customary for October within the CHARM calendar, 2024 has proven to be a particularly busy period for our team and our partners.

On October 15-16, we reached a significant milestone as we convened our annual full team meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Representatives from all seven of our partner organizations—Wits School of Journalism, Magamba Network, DefendDefenders, RFLD, CIVICUS, Fojo Institute, and Civil Rights Defenders—gathered for a two-day reflective retreat. This meeting afforded us the opportunity to celebrate our accomplishments thus far and to collaboratively envision the direction of the consortium for the coming year. We were honored to have Sara Teklemariam, Program Manager, Democracy, Rule of Law, Human Rights and Gender Equality, Regional Development Cooperation, representing SIDA, join us, and we successfully launched several key documents, including our strategic plan, communication and visibility policy, and our newly developed website.

Subsequently, on 18-19 October 2024, four of our partners—CIVICUS, DefendDefenders, RFLD, and Magamba Network—convened in Banjul, Gambia, for the inaugural Africa Engage Hackathon. The virtual competition, which ran for 48 hours, was an opportunity for digital geeks, technology experts, civil society and human rights experts to craft a solution that would make regional human rights mechanisms and tools more accessible and adaptable to citizens across the continent. This event attracted a remarkable total of 220 applications from across the continent, with teams from Somalia/Somaliland, Kenya, and Nigeria securing the top positions. Additionally, representatives from the four organisations attended various sessions at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACPHR) where they were not only able to engage in high level discussions, but also discussed the role CHARM has in the region with high profile delegates, including Honourable Commissioner Rémy Ngoy Lumbu, Chairperson, ACPHR.

We highly encourage you to engage with this month's edition and we wish you an enriching read.

Sincerely,

The Coordination Team



Participants at the Full team meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The annual meeting provides an opportunity to reflect and plan for the year 2025.





## CHARM Full Team Meeting – October 2024 Highlights

The CHARM Full Team Meeting, held on 15–16 October, 2024, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, brought together partners and stakeholders to review progress and strategise for the future. The event focused on advancing human rights, media freedom, and the protection of human rights defenders across Sub-Saharan Africa.

### Key Outcomes:

#### Launch of New Strategies:

The meeting saw the unveiling of the CHARM Compass and Communication Strategy, along with the introduction of a new Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy (GESI). A Business and Fundraising Working Group was also created to enhance resource mobilization. It also saw the new CHARM Africa [website](#) launched, showcasing the consortium's work and offering multilingual support and improved accessibility features.

### Keynote Speakers:

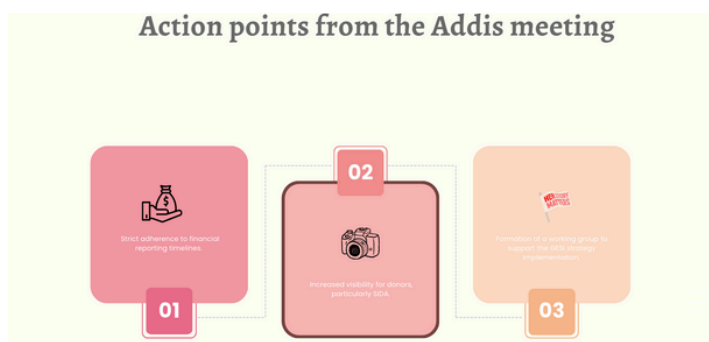
- Hassan Shire, Executive Director of DefendDefenders, emphasized the increasing repression faced by human rights defenders and journalists, highlighting CHARM's support for activists in challenging environments like Eswatini.
- Frew Demeke, Executive Director of the Horn Center for Democracy, addressed the rise of digital threats, such as disinformation, digital surveillance, and targeted attacks on journalists. He also pointed to the economic challenges faced by independent media.



A Wellness Session led by Shimeless Gehebeyu, a wellness expert at the Oasis training and Consultancy, provided participants with tools to manage stress and maintain resilience in high-pressure advocacy work. Topics included self-care, compassion fatigue, and strategies for mental and physical well-being.

The meeting underscored the importance of continued collaboration, strategic alignment, and the integration of gender and social inclusion in CHARM's future initiatives. With a focus on protecting human rights defenders, promoting media freedoms, and addressing the challenges facing marginalized communities, CHARM is poised to strengthen its impact across Sub-Saharan Africa in 2025 and beyond.

### Action points from the Addis meeting







## Unleashing Innovation for Human Rights: The African Engage Hackathon

On 18-19 October 2024, ten innovative teams gathered for an exciting 48-hour marathon at the Africa Engage Hackathon, where they were tasked with a bold mission: to create a digital solution that would make the regional human rights mechanisms more accessible and engaging for all Africans.

This groundbreaking event marked a historic first—introducing a digital approach to human rights advocacy through technology. A diverse team of eight experts, representing four leading organisations—DefendDefenders, Magamba Network, RFLD, and CIVICUS—came together virtually and in person at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Centre, alongside the 81st Ordinary Session of the ACHPR.

Honourable Commissioner Rémy Ngoy Lumbu, Chairperson of the ACHPR graced the event, emphasising the critical role such a consortium plays in driving forward digital solutions for human rights across the continent. He highlighted the importance of breaking down these digital barriers to engage key stakeholders within the ACHPR.

The hackathon opened with a thought-provoking discussion led by John Gbenagnon, The Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement (RFLD) Senior Program officer and Munyaradzi Dodo, the Projects Officer at Magamba Network, on the transformative power of technology in advancing human rights. Paul Mulindwa, advocacy and campaigns officer, CIVICUS, further delved into how tech-driven innovations can overhaul human rights systems for the better. Following the discussions, participants received one-on-one mentorship to refine their ideas, culminating in the selection of the top solution.

We spoke with the winning team to learn more about their journey through the hackathon, and their inspiring stories are a testament to the power of innovation in making human rights more accessible to all.



**Commissioner Hon Rémy Ngoy Lumbu,**  
Chairperson, ACPHR poses with the team after  
announcing the Africa Engage hackathon winners





## **Somaliland's/Somalia's Jimale Abdi Wins Africa Engage 2024 Hackathon with Digital Human Rights App**

Jimale Abdi, the CEO of Tiriig Technology from Somaliland/Somalia, emerged the winner of the highly competitive Africa Engage 2024 hackathon. His team's groundbreaking project, a Digital Human Rights App, was designed to empower citizens in Somaliland/Somalia by providing them with easy access to crucial human rights information.

The app allows users to report violations and connect with local and international defenders, addressing a significant gap in awareness and access to human rights resources within the community.

Abdi's inspiration for the app stemmed from his observation that many people in Somaliland/ Somalia are unaware of their rights and unsure of how to seek help when those rights are violated. During the hackathon, Abdi and his team analyzed the most effective features to tackle this issue, conducting research to refine their ideas and ensure the app addressed the specific needs of their target users.

Despite the team's success, the journey was not without its challenges. Abdi, who managed the development process, highlighted the difficulty of coordinating tasks among team members and ensuring the app's human rights resources were properly translated. "Multitasking was the biggest challenge for me," he admitted, adding that keeping track of mentors and not missing important feedback during the hackathon was a significant responsibility.

Abdi's leadership and focus on teamwork, communication, and time management were key to the team's success. Assigning tasks based on individual strengths, keeping everyone updated on progress, and maintaining open lines of communication helped the team stay organized and on track. "

Time management was crucial. We had limited time to develop our solution, and prioritizing tasks helped us stay focused and meet our goals." Jimale Abdi, the CEO of Tiriig Technology.

When the team was announced as the first prize winners, the moment was a validation of all their hard work. "It felt amazing to know that we could make a difference in our community," Jimale Abdi, the CEO of Tiriig Technology, expressing immense pride in his team's accomplishment. In addition to the win, the team valued the networking opportunities, which allowed them to connect with other innovators and share ideas.

Abdi's success in the Africa Engage 2024 hackathon serves as a powerful reminder that innovation, dedication, and a focus on social impact can drive meaningful change and improve lives on a broad scale.



## Meet Afranet Technologies: Innovating for Human Rights in Africa

Our second runner-up, Afranet Technologies, is a team of technical experts from Nigeria, led by Oluwole Fasakin, a Data-Driven Business Intelligence Specialist with a strong background in engineering, data science, web development, and project management. Fasakin also manages the project-driven tech brand Crintex Solutions LTD. Other key team members include Precious Onyedeké, a computer science graduate and data analyst, Dan Nwahirí, a 400-level mechatronics engineering student, and a talented web developer.

Afranet, short for African Rights Access Network, was created to address urgent human rights challenges across Africa. Their inspiration stems from a growing number of human rights abuses—from abductions and rape to police brutality. Afranet aims to provide a platform that enables real-time reporting, monitoring, and accountability.

***"As we observed the limited access to timely intervention systems, we saw a pressing need for a platform that could document and report human rights abuses across the continent,"*** said Fasakin, team leader Afranet.

While Afranet's mission is crucial, the team faced significant hurdles during development, notably around power and internet access—two essential factors for tech success.

"One of our biggest challenges came when the national power grid went out just six hours before the end of the hackathon. We had to rely on alternative power sources to finish the project.

Just as we were about to submit our work, our internet connection became unstable, and we had to switch providers at the last minute." Fasakin, team leader, Afranet, explained.

Another technical hurdle was the integration of USSD (Unstructured Supplementary Service Data) for offline access. This was the team's first time working with this technology. Despite limited experience with Progressive Web Apps (PWAs), the team overcame the learning curve to create a functional, low-bandwidth solution.

"We were committed to making the platform lightweight yet fully functional. It was incredibly rewarding to see the app come together, especially when we successfully integrated the USSD feature, which we knew would increase our chances of winning," Fasakin, Team leader, Afranet, said.

Afranet is built on a web platform and includes a Progressive Web App (PWA) version to allow users in low-bandwidth areas to access the platform. The team utilized a mix of technologies including HTML, CSS, and JavaScript for the frontend, Python Flask for the backend, Tawk.to for live chat, and Africa's Talking for USSD integration.

The experience also provided valuable networking opportunities. He gained five new LinkedIn connections and now has the contact of a Ghanaian robotics instructor he met during the hackathon. Looking to the future, the Afranet team is eager to build upon their success.

"We plan to partner with human rights organizations across Africa and explore funding options to support further development and scalability. The hackathon was just the beginning." Fasakin, Team leader, Afranet.



## Meet the Winning Team from Kenya : Celebrating Innovation

We were thrilled to announce the third-place winners of our hackathon—an inspiring team from Kenya, led by Salome Monthe Chemiat and comprised of Beryl Apondi, Victor Njogu, Victoria Rotich, Domin Mule, and Brian Chacha. This dynamic group was deeply passionate about using technology to tackle real-world challenges and drive positive social change in Africa, particularly within the education sector.

The team's award-winning project was an innovative AI-powered digital platform designed to enhance access to African human rights instruments, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Kampala Convention. The idea for the platform stemmed from the realization that many individuals—particularly in underserved communities—found these essential legal documents difficult to understand and often inaccessible due to language barriers.

"Our goal was to make these vital human rights resources more accessible and understandable to a wider audience, breaking down the complexities and language barriers." Salome Monthe, the team leader, shared.

Another hurdle was developing the platform's multilingual capabilities, ensuring it could reach a broad and diverse audience across Africa.

To build the solution, the team used Python for the backend, with the Flask framework for the web interface. The frontend was developed using HTML and CSS, and the core of their solution relied on LLaMA (Large Language Model Meta AI) for natural language processing. This enabled key features such as document summaries, real-time Q&A, and multilingual support.

One of the team's most memorable moments was when they successfully implemented the multilingual Q&A feature. Salome Monthe, the team leader, recalled, "Seeing the platform respond accurately to queries in different languages reinforced our belief in the project's potential impact. This breakthrough was incredibly motivating and encouraged us to push through other challenges."

Winning the hackathon was an incredible moment of affirmation for the team. "It was a huge recognition of the importance of our project and its potential impact on human rights education across Africa," said Salome Monthe, the team leader, "We were thrilled and even more motivated to continue developing the platform."

The hackathon also provided the team with valuable opportunities to connect with mentors and experts in AI ethics, legal tech, and human rights. The feedback they received on enhancing accessibility and exploring potential partnerships has been crucial as they move forward.

Salome Monthe, the team leader, advice for future participants? "Embrace collaboration and stay focused on the problem you're trying to solve. Don't be afraid to pivot if needed and always keep the end-users in mind. Hackathons are intense, but they're a fantastic opportunity to make a real impact through innovation and teamwork."

The team couldn't be more excited about the potential impact of this project on advancing human rights education in Africa, and we look forward to seeing the team's continued success.





## About CHARM

CONSORTIUM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND MEDIA IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA (CHARM) aims to promote and protect human rights, civic space and media freedoms in Sub-Saharan Africa.

CHARM is a partnership of CIVICUS, Civil Rights Defenders, DefendDefenders, Fojo Media Institute, The Wits Centre for Journalism, Réseau des Femmes Leaders pour le Développement, and Magamba Network.

The partnership acknowledges the role that a free and active media and civil society have in the protection of robust democracies and the promotion of national development.

## CHARM is funded by:



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