

The Digital Agenda Insights



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Tech Should Serve Not Control

Welcome to The Digital Agenda Insights Newsletter

Sometimes it takes being forced offline to realise how much we rely on the internet. Without the constant notifications and scrolling, we notice things we have been missing, such as the quiet time to think, finishing tasks we have been putting off, and reconnecting with ourselves.

We also see how much control we give to technology. Traditional media feels limiting compared to the freedom of online content, but being offline reminds us that we decide what influences us. In the quiet, we can rediscover our faith, reflect on life, and feel a sense of inner peace that no screen can give.

The truth is, the internet is useful, but it can also control us if we are not careful. Life is bigger than the digital noise. We need to make space to think, connect with others, and nurture our spiritual well-being before a crisis forces us to do it.

So here is the question we all need to ask ourselves: What is your continuity plan when the internet goes off?

This is not a theoretical exercise. Recently, Ugandans got a firsthand taste of the hidden control embedded in a cashless society when the internet was switched off and mobile money services were restricted. Essential services and businesses that are totally digital came to a sudden, grinding halt.

That experience is a stark, global warning. It reveals the fragility of systems we have come to depend on completely. It emphasises why building digital resilience and consciously taking back control of our attention, time, and autonomy is more critical now than ever.

At the Digital Agenda Forum, we continue to emphasise one simple truth: technology should serve us not control us.

We invite you to walk with us.



Lilian Agaba Nabwale

For the Digital Agenda Forum

OUR CORE VALUES



Stewardship



Purpose



Authenticity



Dignity

From Digital Dependency to Digital Resilience



1. The Comfort Trap

For years, digital systems have promised ease: faster decisions, seamless services, instant access. We have built our institutions, businesses, and even governance on this comfort. However, convenience slowly turned into dependency.



5. Designing for Failure

Resilient systems assume disruption. They plan for it. They ask uncomfortable questions:

- What if the network is down?
- What if the platform is unavailable?
- What if access is denied?



2. The Day the System Goes Silent

Then it happens; power cuts, internet shutdowns, system failures, cyber incidents. Suddenly, nothing works. Not because people forgot how to work, but because systems forgot how to fail gracefully.



6. The Shift We Must Make

The future lies not in abandoning digital tools, but in deploying them with wisdom and foresight.

** From blind dependence to intentional design.

** Strike a balance between convenience and continuity.



3. Dependency Is Not Innovation

True innovation does not collapse when technology pauses. A system that works only when everything is online is not smart, it is fragile.



7. Resilience Is the New Digital Maturity

In a world of uncertainty, the strongest systems are not the most advanced, but those that are most prepared.



4. What Digital Resilience Really Means

Digital resilience is the ability to continue operating when technology fails.

It means offline backups, parallel manual processes, local control, data sovereignty, and human judgment still in the loop.

By **Digital Agenda Forum**

Internet Shutdowns Are Not an Exception Anymore

Once considered extreme, internet shutdowns are quietly becoming a standard policy response. From elections to security crises, governments now reach for the “off switch” to control narratives, limit coordination, or manage risk.

Tanzania enforced wide digital restrictions during the 2025 election period. Iran has repeatedly throttled or shut down internet access during protests, keeping critical services online while isolating citizens from the global web. Uganda’s multi-day shutdown during national elections in 2021 and 2026 continues to expose just how dependent essential services, businesses, and even democratic processes have become on continuous connectivity.

The pattern is clear: shutdowns are no longer anomalies but are a part of modern governance playbooks.

Connectivity disruptions are no longer hypothetical, they are expected events. We can no longer be convinced that full cloud and full online is the only way. It is time to return to building offline systems, local data sovereignty, and mesh or fallback architectures that allow societies, institutions, and economies to function even when the internet is restricted or unavailable.

There should be preparedness in a world where disconnection is now a policy tool.

By **Digital Agenda Forum**

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Connectivity failure is no longer a possibility to debate, but an inevitability to prepare for.

Can AI Replace Humans?

For decades, scientific pundits and tech futurists have warned that AI will soon replace humans. We are told it is coming for our jobs, our creativity, even our decision-making. The implication is that it is only a matter of time before robots run our offices, write our novels, and manage our emotions.

In the 1960s, experts predicted that machines would handle translation, medical diagnoses, and even driving by the early 2000s. Indeed, today we do have translation apps, yet they sometimes hilariously mistranslate phrases, especially when AI is hallucinating on a hot day. In several local languages, the same spelling can mean entirely different things depending on tone and context, and AI definitely struggles to know which is which.

AI is also making inroads in medical diagnosis, but it is far from perfect. Machines can analyse scans and detect patterns faster than humans, yet they often miss subtle symptoms that an experienced doctor would spot instantly. Time and again, AI recommendations have been overturned by clinicians, especially in cases where context, intuition, and patient history matter.

Self-driving cars are on the rise. They manage highways well, but try asking one to survive a roundabout at rush hour.

In meteorology, AI has predicted weather patterns depending on the data fed into it, but it is the local

resident, the one who has lived in that place for years, casually observing how the clouds gather, that can clearly tell, that when they form in a certain direction and the wind blows in a particular way, rain is coming. Time and again, our AI-driven meteorological departments have failed us.

AI has made real strides in fields such as chess, the ancient board game Go, and image recognition. In 2016, Google DeepMind's AI AlphaGo defeated one of the world's top Go players, proving that AI can tackle problems once thought to require human intuition. It excels at studying astronomical number patterns, yet it struggles with basic common sense, empathy, and, ironically, humour. A robot can beat a human at Jeopardy, but it cannot comfort a colleague after a stressful day, nor survive a sudden Wi-Fi outage.

AI has been here with us, is here with us and will be here, but as any other tool. So yes, AI can replace certain tasks, the repetitive ones, even impressive ones. But replacing humans entirely? That assumes they can handle coffee shortages, office politics, or the chaos of a last-minute deadline. Let us not start packing our office chairs just yet. Until then, humans still have the upper hand, at least when it comes to judgement, humour, and showing up on a Monday morning.

By **Lilian Agaba Nabwebale**,
Information Scientist

Ugandans Get a Taste of the Hidden Control Embedded in a Cashless System

It is said that Uganda launched a pilot for its Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), a digital version of the Ugandan Shilling, in late 2025 as part of a large initiative to tokenize \$5.5 billion in real-world assets, partnering with Global Settlement Network (GSN) and Diacente Group. This digital shilling aims to boost financial inclusion, support sectors like agriculture, and integrate Uganda into the global digital economy, aligning with Vision 2040.

On the surface, this sounds and looks like a good idea. It is presented as a solution to the so-called 'inconvenience' of cash, almost telling citizens, "There is no need to carry a heavy wallet anymore."

However, the January 2026 elections in Uganda have already given citizens a taste of what this lifestyle looks like in practice. I am convinced that the shutdown of mobile money services effectively handcuffed families who depend on day-to-day cash, and the internet shutdown suffocated those who rely on remote work.

Imagine falling into the routine of withdrawing cash daily for your basic needs or luxury outing, knowing that anytime you need the cash, it is there. Lo and behold, you wake up one day and see mobile money services are unavailable, or you can send but not withdraw, and sending is restricted

1. Send money
2. Airtime/Bundles
- 3. Withdraw cash (Service Unavailable)**
4. Pay Bill
5. Payments
6. School Fees
7. Financial services
8. Loans
9. Pay Merchant
10. Self Help



Please take note of the following temporary changes as per our regulator's directives:

- No withdrawals
- Maximum of UGX 500K per transaction. [Per transaction type]
- Daily transaction limit of UGX 1.5 million
- Maximum of 3 person-to-person transactions per day regardle...

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to a particular threshold and number of times. The 'over the counter' withdraw charge at the banks is not going to be favourable at any point. You have a family to feed, work to get to and limited cash. What's your next step?

This is the future that CBDCs are promising us!! While they claim to provide convenience and access, they cannot truly guarantee the freedom to withdraw your money at any time.

More importantly, placing the personal and financial information of millions of citizens into a single centralised system raises serious risks. Such a system becomes a prime target for hackers and scammers, and any large-scale breach would directly affect people's lives. Many smartphone users already understand how easily digital fraud can happen. In a highly centralised digital system, one mistake or one click can mean losing everything.

As a Security Operations Center Analyst, I encourage all citizens of Uganda to remember the month of January 2026 when the CBDC is trying to be imposed on them. Saying no is also an answer. Let us not just fall into any trends that come our way.

*By Abaasa Peace Ella,
Security Operations Center Analyst*

PLAN B | What Is your Continuity Plan When the Internet Goes Off?

Two nights before the recently concluded election, the internet was switched off after assurance that there were no plans to do so. And just like that, the technology trap became a lived experience for millions of Ugandans. It was not only political related but also an exposure of our dependence on the internet.

For years, telecom companies have been encouraging us to go digital. Pay online, order online, work online, chat online and even greet customers online. And yes, digital tools have made life easier. Mobile money reduced long bank queues. Online orders helped small businesses grow. WhatsApp became the new office, shop counter, and meeting room.

But that weekend, we realised that when the internet goes off, almost everything goes with it. The same companies that were pushing for this transformation were seen nowhere defending its not going off no matter how bad things got.

Food vendors couldn't receive orders. Banks slowed down. Mobile money agents stared at their phones hoping for a miracle. Boda riders waited for orders that never came. Office workers woke up ready to go for work but then remembered that without internet, email does not open and the ERP does not "ERP."

What could have been working days became public holidays not because people chose to rest but because work now is online.

Some physical shops closed too because customers preferred ordering on WhatsApp or other apps. They only opened to do deliveries and now that customers could not order, they closed. Digital efficiency had worked very well until it didn't.

It is almost shocking that even though we are halfway into digital life, we are fully dependent on it. We have taken on online systems faster than we have built or even thought of alternatives.

The shutdown was just an "inconvenience" according to those who enforced it yet it meant lost income, broken communication, and stalled services to the citizens. Service providers did not even bother explain what to expect or how people could handle the situation. They did not even care to apologise;

they just went silent. Literally.

At home, many of us discovered that everything on our to do lists was impossible without internet. Work, communication and even entertainment betrayed stopped. Smart TVs needed internet, radio apps needed internet. Suddenly, the very expensive televisions we bought became decorations, staring at us and us looking into them as mirrors.

And there was a strange loneliness that came with that period. it felt as though people themselves had gone offline. That is when it hit me that the person who can take total control of the internet in this era can rule the world. One switch can stop businesses, isolate citizens, and silence communication. Even people with millions on their phones could not access their money. Phones worth millions turned into torches, cameras, and alarm clocks. Even biometric machines failed. Elections continued only because there were physical alternatives.

What made this even more shocking is that Uganda is still low on the global digital ladder yet switching off the internet almost paused the country. That is how digital our lives already are and how close digital control is to real power.

At the Digital Agenda Forum, this is exactly why we continue to push for digital growth that is thought through, inclusive, and resilient. Digital systems should have offline options. Critical services should not depend on a single switch and honestly, citizens should be consulted before such major decisions are made.

Digital transformation is good, but total digital dependence without backups is risky. Systems must plan for failure, not just functionality, so that life doesn't become fragile. When the internet goes off, daily operations should not come to a full stop. Have Plan B. What is your continuity plan when the internet goes off?

*By Mariagorreti Batenga,
Incorporator and Tech Practitioner*

UNPLUGGED!

Reclaiming My Mind and Spirit: Lessons from the Internet Blackout

When the internet was switched off, I did not know what other entertainment would be ideal in the meantime. I tried watching TV, but it felt odd. It has been long since I sat in front of a TV to watch anything besides YouTube content. I realised that the TV chooses for you what to watch. You cannot rewind or forward. You take what they offer. Na! I switched it off! I was now worried about sleeping early like old people. Eh! Internet, you definitely came with ulterior motives!

Anyway, at one time I decided to close my eyes just to get in touch with me. I first heard the birds sing, then my thoughts started wandering all over the place. I thought about my mother, I called her. I remembered a story I had not shared with my friend, I called her. I thought about my phone that I had seen with some dirt but had not come round to clean it. I did. [By the way, we enjoy using those phones, but we never keep them clean. Remove that phone cover to see the state of your phone. Thank me later.]

Anyway, I remembered a few things I had been postponing, maybe because the phones had made me busy or there was always something I needed to check on.

I tried using SMS to send important messages, and it was disastrous at the beginning. SMS does not have the auto-correct option. You can't imagine how I murdered English in the first messages I sent! Hmmm! Internet, you are a necessary evil!

I enjoyed the quietness and the way my attention span was reshaping. I liked the fact that my mind was driving my actions. I took walks, I cleaned, I read, etc. I did anything that came to mind. I found this time very refreshing.

I have a good 5-hour collection of Prophet Elvis ministrations and Zoe Melodies worship downloaded on the phone. I indulged myself and had the best of time! To be sincere with you, I want to always switch off the internet at will just to be free! Freedom is in the Lord.

I found myself listening to the worship music with my mind, soul, and spirit all in agreement. My mind was clear and my spirit alert. The lyrics hit differently. There is this particular one that went like, "...and this Kingdom will know no end, and its glory shall know no bounds, for the majesty and power of this Kingdom's King has come. And this Kingdom's reign, and this Kingdom's rule, and this Kingdom's power and authority, Jesus, God's righteousness revealed."

Like a light bulb, my mind picked on the fact that there is a Kingdom whose power and authority has no limits or bounds, and I am a treasured citizen! This warmed my heart! I remember telling myself that the insecure can cut off anything created by man, like the internet, but they will never have power over my soul! They cannot regulate my breath or mind. I am the one that can give them the power to do so! I am the one that allows what influences me. The love, the grace, and the mercies of God are as potent and available to me any time, any day, and no one can do anything about it. More so, sitting and listening to our thoughts is not a bad idea! Maybe then we can pick on the negative vibes that should be dealt with! Maybe we need to count our blessings every day and be thankful to God for the blessings and His mercies that are new every day! I believe that every one of us has something to thank God for. This is only possible if we take time to close off all the noise to reflect on our lives.

We really need to balance our lives and just use the internet for necessary things. Parents need to put their phones aside to spend quality time with their children. We need to put our phones aside to really groom meaningful relationships. We need to hear people's voices on the other end of the phone if they are far off, other than WhatsApp chats.

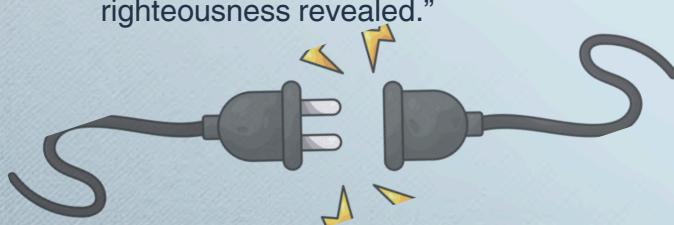
But sincerely, we don't have to be cut off from the internet first for us to do what we ought to do, or be what we ought to be, or know what we ought to know. Then there is ChatGPT that has replaced our thinking.

Truth be told, the internet has its advantages, especially in communication and system operations, but it should be noted that it has gravely affected our lives negatively. It has used us instead of us using it.

I do not downplay the losses in internet-driven businesses like online banking, transport, etc., especially during the digital lockdown, but solely depending on what can perish any time is a disaster in waiting.

All I am saying is that there is more to life than what the eye can see, or the ear can hear, or the hand can touch. Life is spiritual.

By **Carol Tugume Ssekandi**,
Supply Chain Specialist



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