Impact of Submarine Cable Damage on East and Southern Africa's Internet Connectivity

On 12 May 2024, East and Southern Africa experienced significant internet disruptions due to damage to the SEACOM and EASSy submarine cables in the Red Sea. These cables, vital for fiber and mobile broadband services, faced severe interruptions, particularly affecting Tanzania and Mayotte, with Mozambique, Malawi, Burundi, Somalia, Rwanda, Uganda, Comoros, Madagascar, and Sierra Leone also experiencing impacts. This damage drastically reduced internet speeds and reliability across the region.

Given that 95% of internet services depend on undersea cables, even brief disruptions can profoundly impact businesses, causing slowdowns, outages, and substantial operational challenges. The recent damage disrupted daily operations and online transactions, leading to revenue losses and necessitating costly emergency measures, such as securing alternative internet connections.

The situation was exacerbated by three major cuts in these submarine cables, alongside faults in the Europe India Gateway (EIG) and Asia-Africa-Europe 1 (AAE-1) cables. Kenya's largest telecom operator, Safaricom, implemented redundancy measures to mitigate the impact, including rerouting traffic and employing backup systems to maintain service continuity.

Similar disruptions have occurred in the past, particularly during the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, where actions by the Houthis in the Red Sea have targeted maritime traffic and critical infrastructure, including submarine cables.